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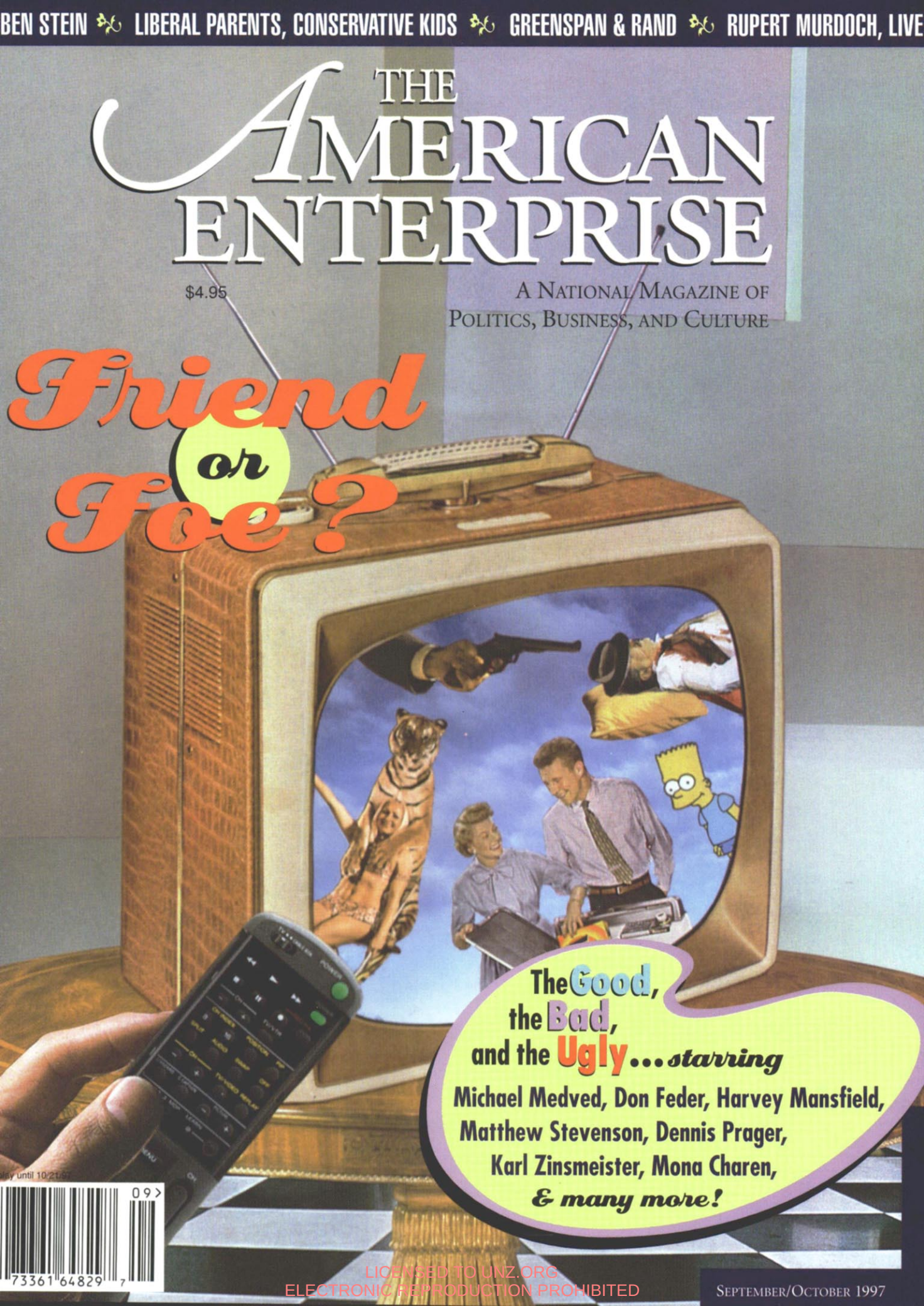

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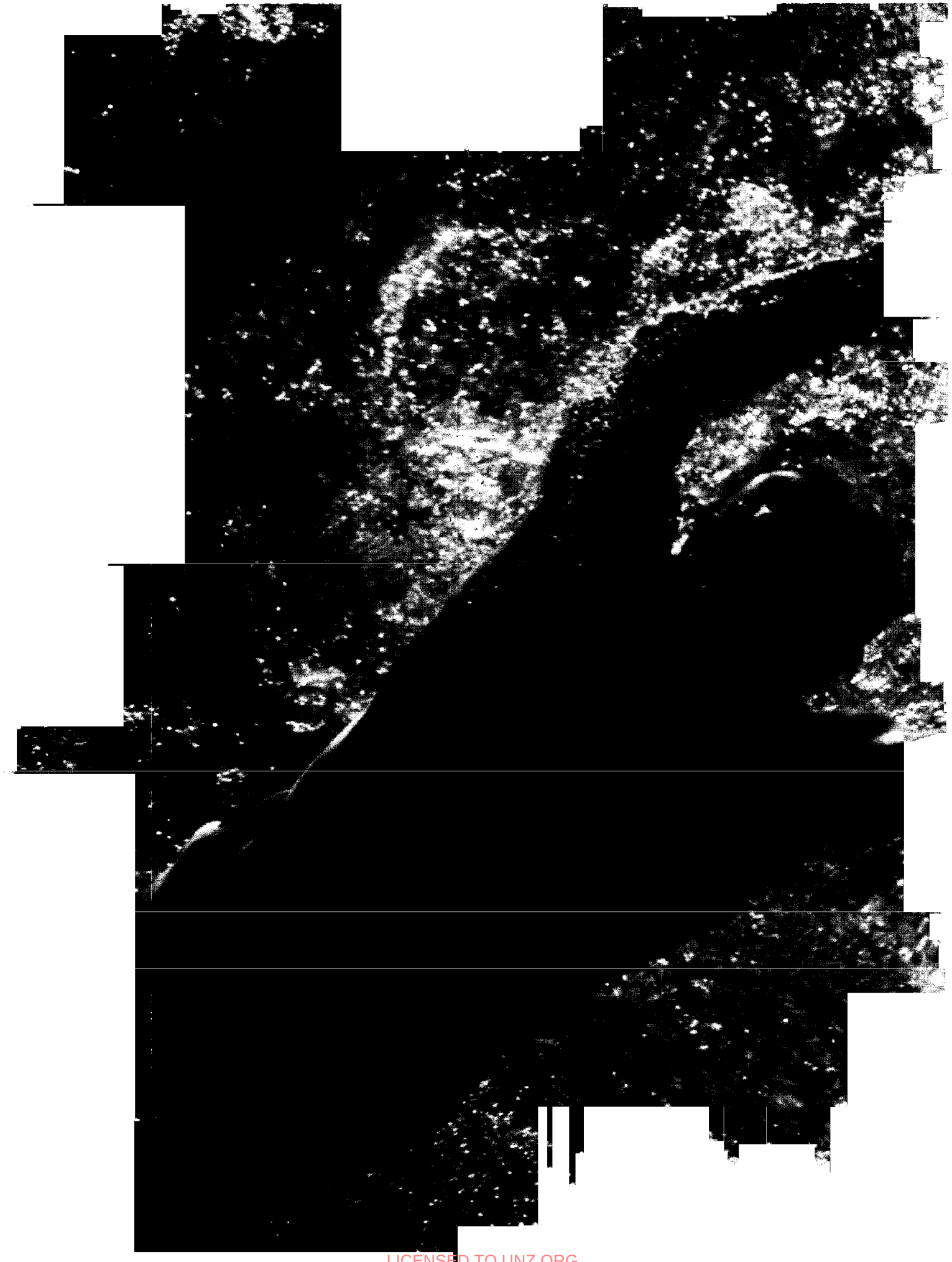

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September/October 1997 Vol. 8, No. 5

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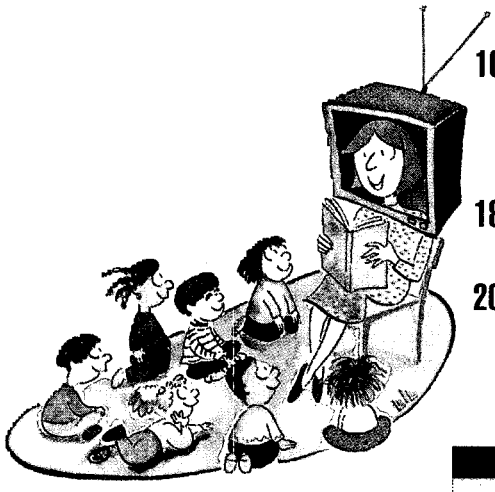

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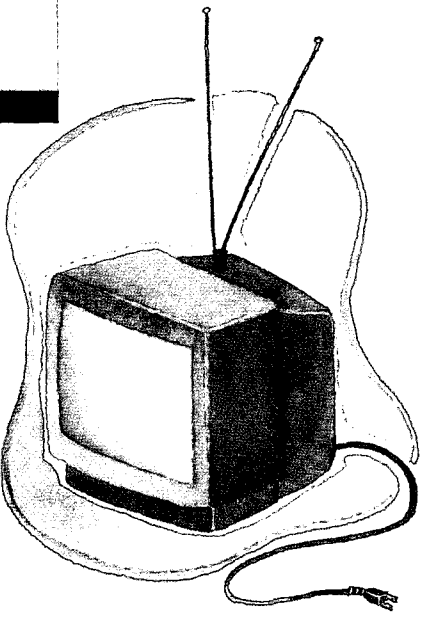

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Bird's Eye

MONA CHAREN

To see, or not to see?

Picture the typical American family circa 1938, huddled around the (one) family radio in the living room, enjoying "Fibber McGee and Molly," "The Lone Ranger," or Lowell Thomas. It's a warm image. Why?

For one thing, radio fare was benign. With a few exceptions, like Father Coughlin, radio news and entertainment was lively, funny, and mild. Parents had no fear of their children's hearing bad language or sordid subject matter. There was no family hour. Though radio reached its prime at a time of travail for the country, during the Great Depression and Second World War, its overall tone was upbeat and optimistic.

Today, three out of four American households contain at least two television sets, and half possess three or more. Families no longer gather to watch television, they disperse. Critics have speculated about the effects of "narrowcasting" on the society as a whole—will national unity endure in a world where only a few hundred thousand or a couple of million viewers are watching the same shows?—but little has been said about its effects on the family.

Television is arguably the most potent institution in society. According to Bill Bennett's *Index of Leading Cultural Indicators,* preschool children watch an average of four hours of television per day. Teenagers watch about 21 hours per week. By contrast, teenagers spend only about 5.6 hours per week doing homework, 1.8 hours reading, and 35 minutes talking with their fathers. We have heard that the family meal is a thing of the past. Most families now eat in shifts, or graze. And though Americans actually have more free time than they did two decades ago, that time has not gone into conversation or flute lessons. It is sucked into the endlessly ravenous maw of television. Americans park themselves in front of the screen on average about a half-dozen hours every day—a simply astounding figure. As columnist Maggie Gallagher points out, that's three times as many hours as Americans devote to religious, community, cultural, or educational events combined.

THE QUESTION FOR THE CONSCIENTIOUS PARENT BECOMES: IS IT WORTH CRAWLING THROUGH THE MUCK TO REACH THE FLOWERS?

Newton Minow famously described television as "a vast wasteland" in the early 1960s. Today, it is more like a wasteland punctuated with the odd oasis here and there. So the question for the conscientious parent becomes: is it worth crawling through the muck to reach the rare flowers?

Clearly not everything in the channel-rich world of broadcast and cable TV is garbage. Prof. Harvey Mansfield (p. 46) notes the unique contribution of C-SPAN, the anti-journalism of television. C-SPAN's mission is to eliminate the filter between government and politics and the public. In Mansfield's words, C-SPAN adopts the "citizen's point of view instead of the wise guy's." Indeed, and in the process it makes the wise guys look small-minded and insular.

The offerings of public TV—whatever one's view of federal funding—are among the best programming on television. "Nova" and "Great Performances," "Frontline" and "The American Experience" inform, educate, and occasionally even

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uplift. Is the viewpoint left of center? It is. Is the quality undeniable? Yes. Ken Burns' "The Civil War" may well be the best documentary in the history of television, and it could not have been produced for any other medium. Too visually arresting for radio, much too long for the movies, "The Civil War" was far more than a show. It was a national reunion. By revisiting the Civil War, those who watched—and millions did—better understood who we are as a nation. That's a tall order, but TV filled it.

The children's programs on PBS—while a bit top-heavy with political correctness—are nevertheless educational, enjoyable, and safe. Fred Turner (p. 37) argues that "Wishbone," another PBS product, exemplifies "fine workmanship, decent values, and imaginative use of the medium." Commercial entertainment television, however, has more than confirmed Minow's description.

It isn't just the violence. Whole forests have given their lives to support the condemnation of television violence. And it is execrable. But TV degrades through more than violence. The coarseness of language, the lack of respect shown by children toward parents, the lewd humor, the absence of religion—these too are hammer blows that leave one wincing.

Just as troubling as the fare itself is the way it is now received—children and teenagers watching television for hours on end in their own rooms without their parents. The typical radio family of the 1930s gathered in the living room to share the same experience. When troubling news came over the air, parents were able to interpret and put it into context for their children. Today, the most common viewing practice is more like Mom and her boyfriend in the bedroom, Junior in his room, and Sister in hers. No one has heard from Dad in several months. Parents do not know what their kids are seeing—thus the enthusiasm for the V-chip—and do not explain or interpret for the benefit of children.

The other night, as research for this essay, I tuned to one of the networks' made-for-TV movies. College roommates were getting acquainted. One schemes to be left alone in the dorm room, kicks over her large suitcase and unzips it. Inside is the bloody and bruised dead body of a young woman.

As Evan Gahr (p. 58) points out, producers of television entertainment, when criticized, unfailingly hide behind the claim that vulgar or prurient programs reflect "gritty reality." What makes these folks suppose that the sordid and ugly is more real than the beautiful? And frankly, the "realism" the networks claim is false in any case. Prof. David Fabianic, a criminal justice professor at the University of Central Florida, has studied who kills and who is murdered on prime-time network television and has found that women are three times more likely to be killers on TV than in real life, while whites commit 90 percent of murders on the tube, but only 40 percent in life. The Media Research Center found that the most commonly portrayed murderer is not a criminal but a businessman. So much for reality, gritty or otherwise. The truth is that it is always far easier to degrade than uplift. Taste is the perhaps easiest quality to corrupt.

Several contributors to this issue grapple with the medium-or-message question. Matthew Stevenson (p. 60), Michael Medved (p. 54) and Dennis Prager (p. 48) are convinced that it is the nature of the medium itself that erodes standards.

Prager undertook to make a talk show that would address serious religious and cultural issues and found that his best ratings were for a show featuring women's lingerie.

Medved argues that the medium is particularly good at presenting pictures of horror and pain. The visual media can't easily explain anything, says Medved. Accordingly, they do most what they do well: shock, titillate, and horrify.

Or lull.

Medved's themes are taken up by the TV-free parents Karl Zinsmeister interviews (p. 63). Parents who have banished the box from their homes are a growing band of internal exiles, shielding their families from those who, in the words of Connie Marshner "are dumping their garbage in [our] living room." These refugees are agreed that the cultural environment of the United States is polluted and the bilge is most intrusive in the form of television. Is careful discrimination a workable alternative to abstinence? Several abstaining parents make a strong case for the negative. The lure of television, if the box is available, is quite strong—while the effect is to turn kids into somnolent, insolent, prematurely "sophisticated" brats. Whereas when TV is simply unavailable, no struggles erupt over what and how much to watch, and according to the reports of parents, the results—increased reading, greater imaginative play, less cheekiness, more quiet, and a longer, more innocent childhood—are enormously life-enhancing.

Is it possible to live without the contributions of TV news? Don Feder (p. 44) argues that there is less and less news on TV these days anyway, just one long health report. And when news does elbow its way in, it is biased.

Eliminating TV from your home will not banish the effects of the culture on your family. But it will place the most noisome aspects of that culture at one remove.

Give the box the heave-ho? The only remaining doubt in my mind is the forbidden-fruit problem. Will children utterly deprived of TV overdose on it once they leave home? Will they never learn to regulate their consumption? Some parents allow TV viewing on weekends only—the course has adopted in response to this issue of TAE.

It's an outrage that we should be reduced to fending off our own culture this way, barricading ourselves and our children against Hollywood and its poisonous products. The nation should stand up and shake the TV industry by its ankles. And not just television, all of pop culture. But pending such a revolt, we can dictate only our own small sphere, with the comfort that at the end of the day, it may not be so small after all. In his new book *Drawing Life*, David Gelernter has written, "I am not sure that each man cultivating his garden is not our only shot at saving the world."

This installment of BIRD'S EYE is guest-written by Mona Charen, one of America's leading cultural commentators who appears weekly on television and in newspapers across the country.

This issue of *The American Enterprise* was edited by Scott Walter. The articles were commissioned by Karl Zinsmeister.

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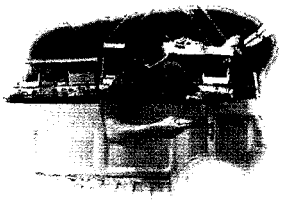

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Sidelights

John Ruppell was arrested for drunk driving when Florida police saw a 3½-foot, green-and-orange iguana piloting his car. · · · Long-term heavy drinkers suffer no psychological or intellectual deterioration—according to researchers at the, uh, Australian National University. ❧ The just-launched My Pet TV Network began with four times the subscribers of CBS's Eye on People cable channel; shows include "Furriest Home Videos" and "Hollywood's Rich & Furry." · · · "Tourists recognize the television reporters; they never recognize the senators," Senate historian **Donald Ritchie** reports. · · · Anyone for conspiracies? **Chuck Norris**'s "anachronistically masculine" TV series receives far less publicity than *The X-Files* even though it has 2.5 million more viewers, *Time* notes. ❧ Promise Keepers,which urges tens of thousands of men nationwide to be responsible, self-disciplined, and God-fearing, has drawn fire from National Organization for Women president **Patricia Ireland**: "Promise Keepers have created a false veneer of men taking responsibility when they really mean men taking charge." ❧ Several states are considering legislation that would make obtaining marriage licenses difficult or impossible without proof of pre-marital counseling. · · · Genetic intuition: A study of women whose chromosomal eccentricities resemble those of men found that such women tend to lack "awareness of others' feelings" and be "oblivious of the effect of their behavior" on other family members, reports *Nature*. ❧ Michigan's and Ohio's economies, once seen as Rust Belt dinosaurs, are soaring; the states now spend tens of thousands to attract high-skill workers to labor-starved companies. · · · Yet "in a 1987 bestseller, **Ravi Batra** wrote that a new Great Depression, at least as bad as the one in the 1930s, 'will occur in 1990 and plague the whole world through at least 1996,'" AEI fellow **James Glassman** reminds us. ❧ The *Washington Post* editorializes: "a new middle-class entitlement for college tuition…may, perversely, lead to increased tuitions rather than increased enrollments."

On "Evans and Novak" **Jesse Jackson** supported boycotts of offensive TV shows: "They feel no constraint but to dump onto the public sex without love, and violence and drugs…lifestyles that are hurting the children and rotting our culture." · · · A ten-year-old boy convicted of raping a 5-year-old girl told the judge he decided to experiment after watching a sex channel on cable TV. · · · National TV-Turnoff Week has been endorsed by the American Medical Association, the American Federation of Teachers, Literacy Volunteers of America, and numerous other organizations. · · · The Pope last year urged "fasting" from TV. ❧ "**Lott** for Sale: Will Build to Suit," read buttons from the conservative National Center for Public Policy Research. ❧ "Do you let your kids on the Internet?" D.J. **Howard Stern** was asked. "They had America Online for about 15 minutes," he replied, "until they got in trouble on it. Hey, I have three girls." ❧ Rep. **Barney Frank** (D-Mass.) is pushing his "Anti-Hypocrisy Act," which would alter military regulations to permit almost unlimited "consensual sex"—adulterous, homosexual, or otherwise. The Family Research Council complains the law "would make Tailhook normative." · · · Soldiers in the U.S. Southern Command may soon be assigned to guard rain forests or build parks in Latin America. "This is a legitimate military issue," insists **Timothy Wirth**, undersecretary of state for global affairs. · · · "Let's face it," says one wag, "The Citadel and VMI are dead. Would that they had died with their boots on, instead of pumps." ❧ **Randall Kennedy**, a black liberal who teaches at Harvard Law School, is skeptical of Clinton's racial "conversation": The "peril" is that he will "sponsor a series of scripted pseudo-events devoid of the candor and contentiousness required for any serious attempt to grapple with the race question." · · · Reparations anyone? Revolutionary-era Americans loyal to the British crown often had to flee to Canada. Their descendants now want compensation for land left behind: One "chap…says he has the deeds for most of downtown Philadelphia," sniffs Canadian legislator **Peter Milliken**. ❧ The Rev. **Bill Hybels**, who has monthly spiritual meetings with Clinton, has urged him to support a partial-birth abortion ban. ❧ A Field Poll finds that even in laid-back California, a majority disapprove of same-sex "marriage," and half support California's *not* recognizing such "marriages" performed in other states. ❧ Only 45 murderers were executed in 1996, down from 56 the year before (the U.S. suffers over 20,000 murders annually). ❧ Actual lawyers' questions at trial, as reported by the Massachusetts Bar Association: "Did he kill you?" "You were there until the time you left, is that true?" —*SW*

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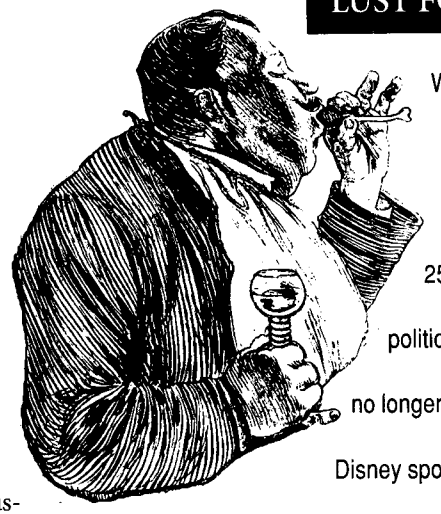
SCAN

LUST FOR GLUTTONY



When Disneyland re-opened its Pirates of the Caribbean attraction not long ago, the 25-year-old exhibit was made politically correct: The privateers will no longer chase maidens. Instead, says Disney spokesman Susan Roth, "the object of their chase will be food." Back to that old view that the surest way to a man's heart is through his stomach, we guess.

PUBLIC HOUSING IS A PRIVILEGE, NOT A RIGHT

In Charleston, South Carolina, where I am chief of police, about 9,000 people—not quite 10 percent of the city—live in public housing. But in Charleston, unlike many other cities, public housing is one of the safest places to live.

Indeed, when our city police officers become fatigued on the job, they are often transferred to the public housing section because that's where they're least likely to have to do high-stress police work. We go year after year without anyone killed in our public housing. We might have two or three sexual assaults in a year—four in a bad year. The number of armed robberies is similar.

People ask: "How do you get this with a population of 99 percent African-American, 100 percent poor people?" People don't think that safe public housing, poverty, and African Americans go together. But they can.

What happened is that Charleston decided to become a responsible landlord. And we in the police department decided we would be there to help. The public housing authority decided they would screen tenants just like any other landlord who expects to provide clean, safe, and secure housing for his tenants.

The housing authority concluded that a conviction on any of 11 crimes indicated a person was not likely to be a successful public housing tenant. The crimes include robbery, sexual assault, pedophilia, burglary, and prostitution. Their thinking was simple: You can't expect to have decent public housing if large numbers of people convicted of serious crimes are permitted to live there.

Essentially, the public housing authority decided to go back to what President Roosevelt had in mind in the 1930s, when public housing was developed in our country. Public housing was designed to rescue people who were living in shanty towns from being exploited by criminals and from having to live in squalid conditions. And that is exactly what public housing did until the 1960s, when public housing became, not a place of refuge, but a place that was crime-producing. It became a place where people were given the right to live simply because they were poor. There were no constraints upon their behavior whatsoever, as long as they could demonstrate that they met the economic guidelines.

Due to reforms in the Reagan and Bush administrations, the code of federal regulations that governs public housing now makes it easier to go back to the pre-1960s standards for public housing. This made it possible for the Charleston Public Housing Authority to screen out those 11 categories of people.

The housing authority also determined that if residents were arrested for these crimes and probable cause was found, it would file civil actions to have them evicted. There is nothing unconstitutional about this. But it is a new approach to public housing.

Public housing authorities often evict people because they don't pay their rent. But the fact that someone is a five- or six-time convicted sexual predator makes no difference whatever to most authorities. In Charleston, though, it did for the first time. And as a result we found fewer and fewer active criminals in public housing every year.

Today public housing in Charleston is a place where you are less likely to be killed or assaulted than in many high-income areas. A little common-sense toughness was successful.

—This is adapted from remarks ***Reuben Greenberg*** *delivered to the Center of the American Experiment in Minneapolis.*

EAST VILLAGE DECLARES WAR ON TURNIPS

As of this writing, the New York state government has yet to agree on the size and shape of its budget for the fiscal year that officially began 121 days ago. Worse, this is the thirteenth straight year the state has failed to pass a timely budget. On each occasion, Albany has had to rely on emergency extensions and financial gimmicks to paper over the delay, with negative effects on the state's credit ratings.

The deepest cause of the annual budget breakdown is New York's sharp regional-ideological division. There is rough parity in the state between very liberal legislators representing New York City and mostly moderate or conservative legislators elected by the rest of the state. Because upstate and downstate roughly balance, the governor is usually

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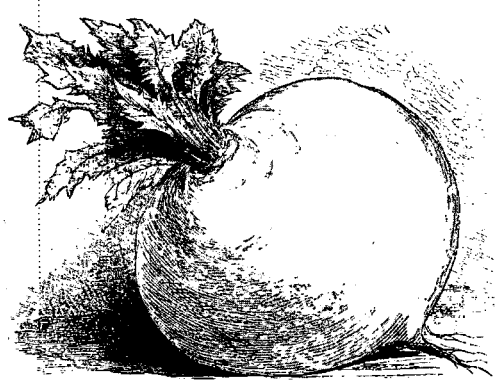
afraid to tip in either direction.

This gridlock goes far beyond budgeting. A war took place this spring, virtually closing down all government decision-making for weeks, over the June expiration of rent controls—which are beloved by liberals even though they've completely ruined New York's housing market. The defenders of rent control were all Manhattanites. The reformers were led by upstate representatives. The battle that took place (ending in an extension of the dingbat status quo) served as a perfect advertisement for the logic of splitting New York into two separate, smaller states.

Where two obviously incompatible populations are yoked together, with neither able to have the kind of principality they would like, why not just set them free? A Greater Manhattan and an Upper York state would each be more cohesive and efficient in choosing their respective destinies. If New York State above Westchester County were broken off as a separate jurisdiction, it would be a locale of six million people with a nice, sensible, quasi-midwestern character, a balanced economy, and a government that could actually pass necessary laws and get rid of stupid ones like rent control and the country's highest tax levies. New York City and its suburbs would be—well, still New York.

After generations of hearing strange voices inside their own heads, many upstaters in particular nurse warm feelings toward the idea of a geopolitical divorce, and Finger Lakes state senator Randy Kuhl has introduced a bill that would allow the formation of two separate states. It's Manhattanites who resist, stating a queer concern that the rest of the state couldn't possibly survive without the metropolis. The idea of splitting the state is ludicrous, says State Assembly Speaker and Manhattanite Sheldon Silver. The rest of the poor state would sink absent the revenues generated by Wall Street and the United Nations, he says. "All of that nonsense about New York City being a drain on the state is ridiculous," he insists. "The rest of the state lives off it." (If so, one wonders why the Speaker isn't leading a hasty march toward city autonomy.)

We say it's time for upstaters to dump some over-ripe cheddar cheeses into New York City's Catskill Mountain water supply. And then declare independence.



BOYCOTT TV NEWS

Florence King isn't going to take it anymore. Our favorite poison-pen essayist told *TAE* she'd "like to start a boycott of TV news. I've drifted naturally into one of my own: Since the election, I've lost my habit of watching the evening news and the Sunday shows. I tell myself I ought to watch them for the sake of my work, but when I turn them on I find myself starting to curdle with revulsion and have to turn them off. I know every smirk on every commentator's face (Frank Sesno has captured the Smirk Crown from Peter Jennings) and every flip of Margaret Carlson's hair."

MARKET NICHE

FNC, Fox's fledgling news channel, faces long odds in its struggle against CNN and MSNBC in the 24-hour news business (see the feature on p. 41 and our interview with Rupert Murdoch, p. 20). But fate may have smiled on the upstart FNC, which claims to offer "fair and balanced coverage" instead of the usual liberal bias: "Don't tell me, you want Fox, right?" a Maryland cable representative was answering callers in July. Seems the cable company was being "swamped" with requests for FNC from viewers seeking the network's live airing of the Senate hearings on the Clinton fundraising scandals.

ABC, NBC, CBS, CNN, and MSNBC had denied the Thompson hearings live coverage, and even the networks' news shows were scanting the hearings. CBS's "This Morning," for instance, went weeks without a peep, and ABC's "World News Tonight," after running nothing for two nights straight, aired a story the next night on "why average Americans seem to be paying so little attention."

Washington Post media critic Howard Kurtz defensively claimed that major newspapers were doing a better job, but even he confessed that TV "is in danger of tuning out." Meanwhile, FNC newspaper ads were bragging about its superior coverage, and Dororthy Rabinowitz of the *Wall Street Journal* was cheering: "The all-news cable channels CNN and CNBC appear to have decided (unlike Fox News, which is providing thorough coverage) to find more worthy fare: another important breaking story, perhaps, disclosing that absolutely nothing new has happened in the JonBenet Ramsey case."

WHEN MTV LOST TO *PARADISE LOST*

Can a taste for serious literature be cultivated among the MTV generation? Professors who substitute detective fiction for Great Books have given up trying. When the only allusions kids know come from television, it's not an easy chore. But it's not Mission Impossible.

Here's a true story. Eighteen students signed up for my course on John Milton. (Already this sounds like fiction.) Eventually, tremblingly, I asked them, Would you like to hold an all-day public reading of *Paradise Lost?* All 10,565 lines? It would take ten hours. Pause. Then a hand, and a question. Soon, yes, they said yes! We made plans and put up posters emblazoned "SIN, LUST, SATAN." Each student signed up to be on duty for an hour and to read if no one else would.

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At 8:00 A.M. on the fateful Saturday, three students put a sign saying "Hell" over the fireplace, set an "on-deck" chair for "next reader" alongside the lectern, spread around copies of books, plot summaries, and reading instructions on nearby chairs, and began to read.

> Of Man's First Disobedience, and the Fruit
> Of that Forbidden Tree, whose mortal taste
> Brought Death into the World, and all our woe,
> With loss of *Eden*, till one greater Man
> Restore us, and regain the blissful Seat,
> Sing Heav'nly Muse....

Oh, they stumbled at times, but they persevered. Smiles started appearing. This was going to work!

Other students drifted by out of curiosity, had some coffee and cookies, caught the spirit, and stayed for two or three hours. Professors from several departments joined in, to the students' delight. This was academic community in operation. After a while, young and old were making a beeline to the "on-deck" chair as soon as its occupant stood up to read the next 100 or so lines. All told, 150-200 people participated. Visiting philosophers at a conference in a nearby hall asked what these students were doing there all day. "Reading *Paradise Lost*," we explained. "You gotta be kidding," they replied.

Poetry is not black marks on white pages with odd margins. It is sound. On the reading instructions I had written, "The longer you read aloud, the likelier it is that the rhythm of the lines will take over and guide you along." And it did.

As part of our afterglow, I reported to Miltonists on an e-mail list. Of those who took up my offer to receive our promotional and instructional materials, the most moving request came from an inner-city high-school teacher in California, who has had her advanced-placement students do what we did.

So don't tell me today's kids won't respond to challenging academic work. I've had my fill of retro-'60s faculty members with political agendas dumping on today's young. Enough of insulting their intelligence with junk culture. There is a hunger for something demanding and wholesome out there. Serious learning is not dead.

—Edward E. Ericson, Jr., is a professor of English at Calvin College.

NEW BLOOD FOR CITIES

Immigration, warns a recent *New York Times Magazine* story, is leading to the "balkanization" of America's once-mighty industrial cities. "In the last half of the 1980s, for every ten immigrants who arrived in New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, and Houston, nine residents left for elsewhere," the article informs us. Meanwhile, city officials and anti-immigration groups charge that immigrants impose large economic burdens on America's inner cities.

Not so fast, argues a new study from the Alexis de Tocqueville Institution (ADTI) in Alexandria, Va. Certainly immigrants have a profound demographic, economic, and fiscal impact on America's largest central cities. More than half of all immigrants reside in just seven cities: Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, Miami, San Diego, Houston, and San Francisco. And true, immigrants impose special strains on these cities—heavier demands for social services, schools, and housing; language problems; and tighter labor markets. But the benefits of an infusion of fresh blood may offset these costs, the ADTI study suggests.

It assesses the local impact of immigration by contrasting the economic condition of cities with the highest immigration and those with the lowest immigration from 1980-90 (and through 1994 where more recent data is available). The 85 most populous U.S. cities, population 200,000 or more, are examined using Census Bureau data on nine different economic and fiscal measures.

The study's findings challenge much conventional wisdom:

- In the 1980s cities with the highest immigration had a job-creation rate twice as high as cities with the lowest immigration.
- Residents of high-immigrant cities are, on average, 15 percent richer than residents of low-immigrant cities. And incomes grew faster in high-immigrant areas as well. Residents of the cities with the most immigrants in 1980 experienced a 95 percent growth in per capita income that decade, versus an 88 percent growth in income for residents in the cities with the fewest immigrants in 1980.

IMMIGRANTS AND CRIME DON'T REALLY MIX

High-immigrant cities	% Foreign-born, 1990	Crime rate, 1991
Hialeah	69%	8 per 1,000
Miami	59	18
Santa Ana	51	8
Glendale	45	5
Los Angeles	38	10
San Francisco	34	9
Anaheim	28	7
New York	28	9
San Jose	27	5
Jersey City	26	9
Average, high immigrant cities	9	

Low-immigrant cities	% Foreign-born, 1990	Crime rate, 1991
Jackson	1%	14 per 1,000
Shreveport	1	10
Birmingham	1	13
Memphis	1	10
Louisville	2	6
Richmond	2	12
Indianapolis	2	7
Mobile	2	13
Nashville	2	9
St. Louis	2	16
Average, low immigrant cities	11	

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• Poverty rates were 20 percent higher in 1990 in the cities with the fewest immigrants than in the cities with the most immigrants. The poverty rate from 1980-90 grew almost twice as fast in the cities with fewest immigrants in 1990 than in the cities with the most immigrants.

What about social conditions? No single factor has contributed to the declining livability of America's inner cities more than crime. Since at least the turn of the century, when the great wave of Germans, Italians, and Irishmen arrived through Ellis Island, Americans have often seen immigrants as a source of criminality.

True or not in the past, crime and immigration do *not* go together today. The nearby table shows that high-immigrant cities in 1990 had a crime rate of 9 per 1,000 residents. Low-immigrant cities had a crime rate of 11—or about 22 percent higher. Only Miami, which has a very heavy concentration of immigrants and also the second highest crime rate of all major cities, is a major exception to the rule.

The ADTI study does not answer the critical question of whether the immigrants cause urban conditions to improve, or whether improved urban conditions cause the immigrants to come. But it does provide compelling evidence to refute the belief that the economic decline of cities is *caused* by immigration. The assertion cannot be true, because, with few exceptions, the U.S. cities in greatest despair—Detroit, St. Louis, Buffalo, Rochester, and Shreveport, for example—have virtually no immigrants.

Some 200 years ago James Madison wrote: "That part of America that has encouraged [foreign immigration] has advanced most rapidly in population, agriculture, and in the arts." That observation may be as true today as it was at the birth of the nation.

*—**Stephen Moore** is an economist at the Cato Institute.*

TALE OF TWO CITIES

Very damaging and very healthy social trends occur side by side in America today. A perfect illustration: Gangster rap and gospel rock are each among today's fastest growing forms of music.

On the one hand, vile new rock and rap groups like Marilyn Manson (named "Best New Artist" earlier this year by *Rolling Stone*) have enjoyed an explosion of media attention and popular following. The members of Marilyn Manson (all male) have taken female first names and the surnames of notorious murderers. Their concerts have included child nudity, gross obscenity, mutilation, and live sex acts. Their songs incite murder and hatred, refer to the bandleader's experiences with abortion, suicide, drugs, and torture, and encourage "anti-Christ" behavior. One of their album covers shows Manson's genitals hooked up to a hose which drains into the mouths of two men. Finding his grandfather's collection of child pornography and seeing his grandfather masturbate are described by the bandleader as formative experiences in his life. (Seagram Company, headed by CEO Edgar Bronfman, markets Manson's music.)

At the same time, there are many encouraging signs on the up side of America's cultural divide:

• The album *Butterfly Kisses* by Christian singer Bob Carlisle has sold more than two million copies this summer, reaching the top of *Billboard's* pop chart for several weeks. Carlisle tells TAE's Dave Geisler that he wrote the title song as a sixteenth birthday present for his daughter. It and the album's other numbers celebrate family love and traditional virtues.

• Kenneth "Babyface" Edmonds, nominated for 12 Grammy Awards in 1997, is an artist who sings often of God, the value of fatherhood, and other positive topics. This year's Grammy-winning song produced by Edmonds, "Change the World," was written by three songwriters who made their reputations in contemporary gospel music.

• The latest album by another Christian rock group, The Newsboys, went gold this summer. The band has put on live concerts recently for more than 600,000 people.

• A gospel singer/songwriter and a 50-voice Dallas youth choir called God's Property have put another album, titled "Stomp," at the top of the Billboard charts this summer. The gospel-rap title cut talks about getting high on faith instead of drugs. They recently appeared on "The Tonight Show."

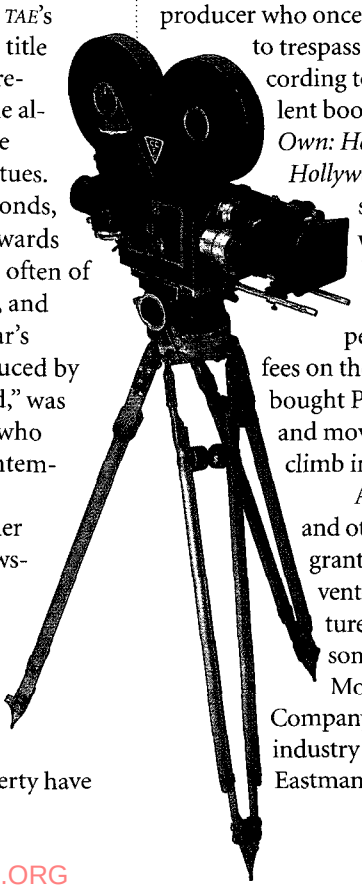
Makes you wonder which tape the teenager next door is listening to, doesn't it?

BAD ECONOMICS MAKES BAD MOVIES

Almost everyone complains about movies today. They're too violent, sleazy, boring, not family-friendly—they just don't make 'em like they used to. But the untold story of Hollywood's decline is the surprising role anti-trust law has played in shaping films. Washington, in short, helps make Hollywood bad.

The movie industry was born in New York and built by theater-owners like Adolph Zukor, who needed "product." At the turn of the century, the theater business was mostly small mom-and-pop operators. Soon savvy businessmen like Zukor bought up small competitors in order to make better pictures that would attract larger audiences.

Zukor also wanted to make movies respectable. He wooed stage stars and teamed up with Jesse Lasky, a powerful producer who once said that he "yearned to trespass on quality street," according to Neal Gabler's excellent book, *An Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood.* The two men shared a vision of what movies could become and a hatred of Paramount's 65 percent distribution fees on their films. So they bought Paramount in 1916, and movies began a 40-year climb in quality.



Along the way, they and other Jewish immigrants ran afoul of the inventor of the motion picture camera, Thomas Edison. Edison formed the Motion Picture Patents Company to control the movie industry and even convinced Eastman Kodak to only sell

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film to people licensed by his company.

Edison's moves were legal—federal anti-trust laws were six years away. The independents went to war with "the Edison Trust" over who would control movies: equipment patent-holders like Edison or theater-owners like Zukor and Carl Laemmle, who later founded Universal Pictures. Laemmle skirted the trust by importing films from Europe and quickly became one of the most successful movie distributors. By 1912, Laemmle and other independents had broken the Edison's monopoly and controlled almost half of America's film business. The market—not the government—had busted the trust.

As the business grew, theater-owners retained control, which irritated trust-busters but ensured quality movies. The studios were what economists call "vertically integrated," meaning they controlled production, distribution, and exhibition. If you wanted to see a Paramount film, you went to a Paramount theater. "Each studio had its own signature," as director Billy Wilder put it. They were brand names, like Coke and Ford, and were publicly accountable for their movies. Why anger long-term customers to make a few bucks on a shocking picture?

Throughout the 1930s and '40s, theater-owners could fire movie moguls, and did—usually for making dull movies, but tasteless movies would have meant even faster firing. Each major studio produced and distributed more than 100 films a year (compared to about 12 today). Movie prices were kept low (between a nickel and dime per person from 1930-55), and the movies were carefully written to entertain at several levels so that adults and children could enjoy the same feature. Families were the core audience.

The large number of films being made gave the vertically integrated studios an incentive to encourage teams to stay together. Today the few production teams that stay together—Merchant-Ivory, for instance—produce better films.

But slowly government intervention in the form of anti-trust decrees undermined the studio system and set producers and distributors at odds with theaters and the public, creating the mess we have today.

The biggest blow was the 1948 anti-trust actions by the Truman Justice Department, which forced the studios to sell their theaters. Now studios had to compete for theater-owners, who wanted sure bets that were highly profitable. That meant stars, special effects, and increasingly graphic sex and violence.

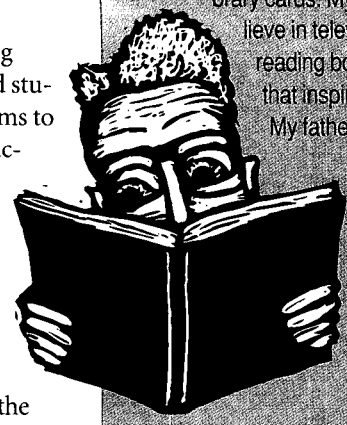
As the movies changed, the industry's family audience drifted away. TV made it easier to stay home, but the changing content and higher ticket prices were major factors. Theater-owners discovered that teenagers viewed movie houses as dark rooms without parents and urged the studios to make films for that audience. Theaters also switched to a high-price, low-volume strategy because the young audience was willing to pay and because special effects, and the other things that the adolescent audience craved continued to climb in price. By the end of the decade, teenagers and young adults formed the core audience for movies, and the slow but inevitable transition to today's movies had begun.

Of course economics is not the sole reason for today's movies, but government intervention did accelerate the move from *The Philadelphia Story* to *Showgirls*.

Can we go back to the good old days? Maybe, but we would have to move a mountain of anti-trust law.

*—**Richard Miniter** has produced more than 400 hours of national television programs.*

CHURCH + LIBRARY - TV + FAMILY LIFE = NOVELIST



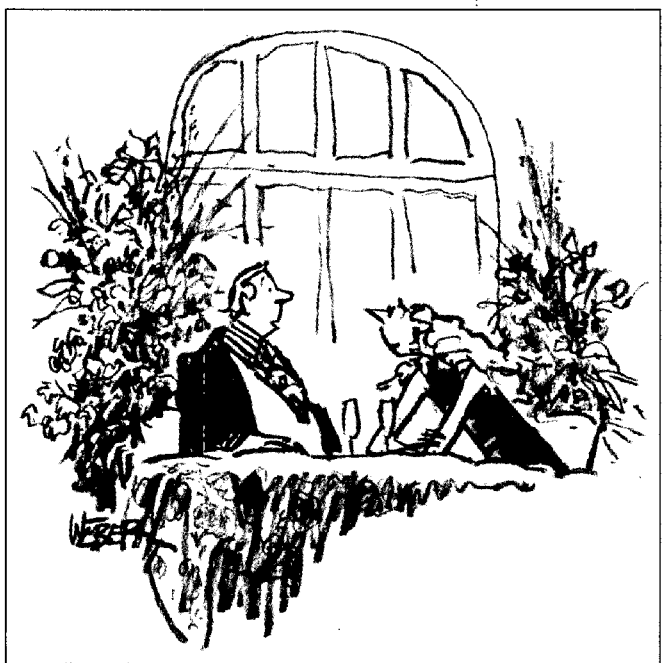
I'm thankful for the influence my mother and father had on my life. My father worked for a construction company, and he was transferred every year or two, depending on where the work was located. The first thing my family did when we moved was join the local church. The second was to go to the library and get library cards. My mother did not believe in television. I grew up reading books, and I'm sure that inspired me to be a writer. My father's family is a family of storytellers, and there were long dinners and lots of stories. As children, we absorbed them.

—Author
John Grisham
in Home for the Holidays

SOILED SOAPS

Don't assume that TV reserves its most depraved offerings for the evening. Indeed, sex- and violence-ridden prime-time shows seem downright quaint compared with what the country's 30 million regular soap opera viewers see during daylight hours.

In fact, the days of our lives have grown increasingly sleazy, as a new study reported in *Glamour* but few other places makes clear. An analysis of ten hours each of "General Hospital," "All My Children," "One Life to Live," "The Young and the Restless," and "Days of Our Lives" found 6.6 sex acts portrayed



Drawing by Weber; © 1995 The New Yorker Magazine, Inc.

"Gee, I'd love to, but that's the weekend my father gets me."

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or discussed during each hour-long episode—a rate over 35 percent higher than ten years ago.

Although studies repeatedly show that married couples have far more satisfying sex lives than singles, carnal relations on these shows were overwhelmingly non-marital (2.4 per hour, compared to the 0.72 hourly rate that hubby and wife bedded down). And sex commonly took place in the context of date rape. In such instances, the victims were always pure as the driven snow. So much for men who are often falsely accused (as happened to a New York City resident in a well-publicized case earlier this year).

Outside the bedroom, soap operas are quite P.C. Businessmen are inevitably malevolent, minorities noble. Consider this rather typical "As the World Turns" episode summarized by soap critic Karen Lindsey: The thrice-divorced Lyla's "friendship with her young Indian border gave her and the viewers a lesson in white insensitivity." Not so her fiancé, Cal, whose "capitalist acquisitiveness [blinds] him to the rights of native people." Lyla then dumps the clod because he's so darn insensitive.

*—**Evan Gahr** is a regular contributor to* The American Enterprise.

HOME IS WHERE THE LAW FIRM IS

Recall Bob Dole's poignant words on leaving the Senate: "I will seek the presidency with...nowhere to go but the White House or home." Listeners thought he meant Russell, Kansas, but Dole turns out to have meant the D.C. law firm of Verner, Liipfert, Bernhard, McPherson & Hand, which recently told the *Wall Street Journal* it plans to hire more lawyer-lobbyists to handle all the new business he's reeling in.

CLEAN TV IS BETTER THAN RATED TV

At a White House meeting in February 1996, the television industry pledged to develop a "voluntary" ratings system to better inform parents about the content of programs. These new guidelines were eventually to work in conjunction with the V-chip, a device to be installed in TV sets that would allow parents to block out objectionable programs. Ten months later, before a horde of journalists, Motion Picture Association of America president Jack Valenti, head of the group charged with developing rating guidelines, unveiled his grand plan to rate TV using an age-based system.

First appearing on TV screens in January, these ratings were criticized as too vague to provide parents with sufficient information to make the best viewing choices for their children. This surprised no one, since surveys show that over 80 percent of parents favor content-based ratings. Yet despite constant criticism and the February release, by the Parents Television Council, of the first quantitative analysis of the new system (*A TV Ratings Report Card: F for Failure*), the industry stuck by its guidelines.

In addition to parents and advocacy groups, strong criticism also came from Capitol Hill, specifically from the Senate Commerce Committee chaired by John McCain (R-Ariz.). By June, he was threatening that broadcasting licenses might be held hostage unless the networks adopted content-based ratings.

Fearing legislation, the industry agreed to sit down with advocacy groups and negotiate changes. After weeks of haggling, the industry announced on July 9 it would, beginning in October, "voluntarily" add *S* for sex, *V* for violence, *L* for crude language, and *D* for suggestive dialogue. The industry also agreed to add a category called *FV* for fantasy violence in shows like "Mighty Morphin Power Rangers." In exchange, Sen. McCain, Rep. Billy Tauzin (R-La.), head of the House Subcommittee on Telecommunications, and others on the Hill promised a moratorium lasting "several years" on any legislation relating to TV ratings and content.

The changes agreed to could prove useful. But the rating system, as well as the V-chip, is only a Band-Aid solution to the real problem of declining standards, particularly during the first hour of prime time, traditionally known as the family hour. It used to be a safe haven for families to sit together and watch wholesome programming. Nowadays, to the consternation of parents everywhere, vulgar language, sex, suggestive dialogue, and violence pervade this hour. Moreover, the bully pulpit which many in Congress have used to raise this issue has now been pulled out from underneath them for "several years."

As Senator Joseph Lieberman (D-Conn.), a leading proponent of a return to the family hour, has said, "Garbage labeled is still garbage." The real solution is for Hollywood to clean up its act.

*—**Mark Honig** is executive director of the Parents' Television Council in Los Angeles.*

A VIRTUAL PUBLIC REALM IS NOT ENOUGH

In the automobile slum that our public realm has become, there is little operational grace for children. The young can't function in a world that has been designed solely for the convenience of motorists. The public realm for American children is therefore

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no longer the city block, town park, or sidewalk. It is instead, by default, the psychotic principality of TV.

American suburbia has a magnificent private realm. Nobody builds more luxurious houses than we do, with more bathrooms per inhabitant than any other place on earth. But the public realm of suburbia is composed of parking lots, berms, planting strips, highway medians, and little in the way of consciously embellished civic property. Why is that a problem? Because the public realm is the setting for our civic life, and where it exists in an impoverished form, civic life suffers accordingly.

Perhaps psychologist James Hillman is right when he asserts that, despite all our lip service to "family values," Americans actually hate their children. Much of the content of television is manifestly hateful—from the stock sadism of HBO movies to the sociopathic doggerel of "Yo, MTV Raps"—and children cannot fail to be affected by it. It is absurd to believe that children do not model their behavior on the antics of these characters, who are, after all, the denizens of their public realm.

But even if the content of TV were benign, it would still be problematic as a substitute for real civic life. One of the more insidious delusions of the Electronic Age is the notion that the virtual is an adequate substitute for the authentic: A virtual friend on the Internet is as good as a real friend, and so forth.

All sane people recognize that the artificial public realm of TV is not an adequate substitute for authentic community life. Emotional involvement with soap opera characters is not the same as having relationships with real people (though plenty of adults seem to be confused about this these days). And Barney the dinosaur is neither a true companion to a child nor an imaginary companion equal to the typical youngster's innate imaginative ability (which is precisely why Barney is so sickening to many parents).

We are fortunate that the power of the virtual is somewhat self-limiting in the face of the authentic. Right now TV is in the process of downgrading itself even as a fabulous time-wasting medium. The more channels we add, the more frantically uninteresting everything becomes. As things stand today, the obvious destiny of TV is 500 channels of infomercials.

Among the great political issues in the twenty-first century will be the mess that we have made of our everyday world, and especially the deleterious effects on children. Amidst the tides of cultural sewage now overflowing our national life, there is growing recognition that we desperately need something better, more worthy of the human spirit. What we have achieved in our time is the creation of too many public realms and institutions that are simply not worth caring about. Unless this is changed, the consequence will eventually be a country and way of life not worth defending.

—James Howard Kunstler is author of Home from Nowhere, *which was reviewed in our March/April issue.*

AFFIRMATIVE ACTION LIES

The press has recently bubbled with hysterical reports on declining minority enrollment at law schools in Texas and California. New laws requiring color-blind admissions have been called catastrophic and unfair. Nonsense. First, just because a few schools have seen minority enrollment fall doesn't mean anyone is missing out on an education.

For instance, the *New York Times* and the Associated Press both ran stories on poor Malcolm LaVergne, who supposedly wanted to attend the University of Texas law school, but because of the new policy decided to turn U.T. down. Well, poor LaVergne in fact wanted to go to Cornell—as the *Ithaca Journal* learned by asking him—was accepted there, and will attend. Some tragedy.

Second, most law schools around the country are functioning the same as always, as Cornell's assistant dean for admissions, Richard Geiger, admits: "There's a lot of places for people to go if they're not accepted to the Texases of the world." Yes, 176 other accredited law schools to be precise. And no one's ever died from switching to U.C., San Diego, from U.C., Berkeley.

In fact, as applicants and schools become better matched, minority *performance* will actually improve. Schools like Berkeley won't be allowed to continue admitting students whose presence lets the school preen itself on its diversity while they end up flunking out, even though they would have flourished at a school one notch down.

Still, long-term boosts to academic achievement by minorities will require attacking the root cause of the problem—inner-city public schools. Vouchers anyone?

—Thomas Chandler, a TAE *intern, is an undergraduate at the University of Richmond.*

THE PRICE TAG ON JAPANESE REGULATION

Investment bankers Takuma Amano and Robert Blohm recently totaled up the losses that accrued in Japan when its system of state-managed capitalism collapsed earlier this decade. Japan's refusal to liberate critical sectors of its economy from interference by government ministries caused pressure to build up that finally led to a business collapse which wiped out a staggering total of nearly $10 trillion in asset values in the first half of the 1990s. That, the authors note in the *Wall Street Journal*, is "equivalent to Japan's estimated economic loss from World War II."

SCHOOL CHOICE TRIUMPH

School choice advocates in Minnesota have struck a mighty blow to the educational status quo. Led by Governor Arne Carlson, the Minnesota state legislature has enacted reforms, including an increase from $650 to $1,625 in the existing tax deduction per child in grades K-6, and from $1,000 to $2,500 per child in grades 7-12. This deduction covers private school tuition, fees, transportation, textbooks and instructional materials, summer school, tutoring, and educational computer materials. In addition, a new refundable educational tax credit of $1,000

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per child for families with annual incomes under $33,500 was enacted, as well as provisions expanding charter schools and public-school choice programs.

Steve Forbes, whose Americans for Hope, Growth, and Opportunity ran local radio ads supporting the legislation, hailed "the biggest victory for parents' rights and the biggest defeat of the bureaucracy and teachers unions to date" and urged other states to "follow their inspiring example."

MORE STEAM FROM THE SOCIAL SECURITY KETTLE

Most people know the problems with Social Security. It is approaching bankruptcy, it provides paltry benefits for the contributions offered, and it discourages private savings. What is surprising is that a number of sitting legislators have come to the same realization and have decided to do something about it.

In early May the Oregon legislature adopted a resolution asking Congress to enact a waiver system that would allow residents of any petitioning state to opt out of Social Security in favor of an alternative retirement plan of their own design. The resolution, which passed the Oregon Senate 20-8 and the state House 31-22, was introduced by Senator Gene Derfler after he heard the idea discussed by José Piñera, the man responsible for the privatization of Chile's pension system, and Steve Buckstein, president of Oregon's Cascade Policy Institute. Derfler says Oregon would like state residents to be able to keep their dollars and invest them the way they want in a retirement plan.

The Oregon resolution explicitly acknowledges Social Security's failures and the potential benefits of a decentralized, privatized system. It states that "investment return on Social Security contributions made by many workers today is significantly below that available from other sources," whereas "more retirement investment alternatives might dramatically increase Oregonians' savings rate and retain more young adults who otherwise would leave the state for jobs elsewhere."

This bill signals growing discontent with the Social Security system as well as the popular will to implement serious reform. Since Chile fully privatized its Social Security system under Piñera's guidance in the early '80s, the country has had an average annual growth rate of 7.5 percent and retirees have collected returns that dwarf what the government plan offered.

The Oregon legislature asks: If Chileans can benefit from privatization, why can't Americans? It is time for Congress to pose the same question.

—Aaron Steelman is staff writer at the Cato Institute.

INSTEAD OF THE NEA . . .

Many arts activists argue that the future of art in the United States rests on the reauthorization of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) this year. As an artist who has studied the agency, I believe it's time to phase out the NEA and have the federal government support artists by more democratic, less manipulative methods. What artists and arts organizations need most from Washington is not a $10,000 NEA grant, but changes in the tax code that can dramatically improve conditions for all artists.

The IRS harms artists on several fronts, the self-employment tax foremost among them. This tax swallows precious funds, complicates accounting, and squanders creative time in bookkeeping. It is a notoriously tricky process for artists to itemize and carry over business expenses: a painter may sell a canvas for $125,000 one year and sell nothing the next. The IRS offers meager, difficult deductions for self-paid health insurance, rather than providing incentives to purchase coverage or form insurance groups. And the home-office deduction, which makes sense for many artists, is complex, subjective, and hard to document. It is likely to trigger an IRS audit; hence many artists shy away from it.

The IRS has also created disincentives to charitable giving to the arts: Individuals cannot take a deduction for donations unless they itemize on their tax returns. Wealthy givers are hamstrung by arcane rules governing deductions for donated art that has appreciated over a lifetime. And the law encourages art to be brought to auction rather than donated.

As for literary artists, they suffer from ill-conceived changes to tax law in the 1970s that effectively killed backlists of older books, once the pride of great publishing houses like Knopf and Norton. Forced to pay tax on inventory, publishers have no choice but to "remainder" thousands of titles, many of literary merit by younger writers whose careers never get a chance to develop. The decline of books of poetry in print has been nothing less than catastrophic.

Reforming IRS practices to help artists will mean reduced tax revenue. But these changes would be a much better investment in the arts than continued spending on the NEA.

—William Craig Rice, a poet and essayist, teaches expository writing at Harvard University.

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By John J. Miller

Indicators

Special Edition on Immigration

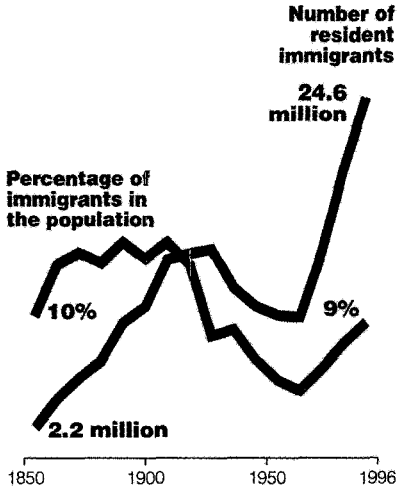
MILLIONS OF IMMIGRANTS

More immigrants live in the United States today than ever before. Almost 25 million residents—nearly one out of every ten Americans—was born abroad. That is up from less than one out of 20 in 1970.

And this rate is bound to rise further, because about 1.1 million new arrivals now come to the U.S. each year (perhaps 70 percent of them legally, the rest as illegal aliens).

Just the same, **immigrants are a smaller share of the total U.S. population today than they were at any time between the Civil War and the 1920s.** That hasn't stopped immigration from emerging as one of the great political issues of the 1990s, however.

Immigrants Within the U.S.



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census.

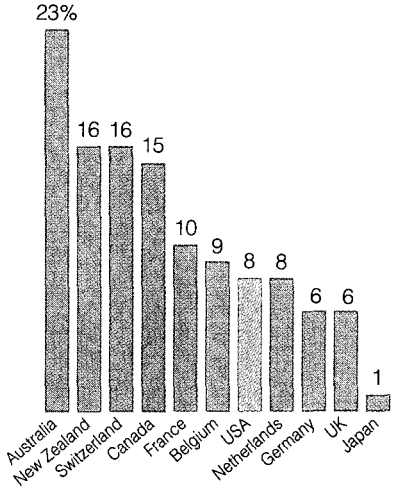
INTERNATIONAL MAGNET

The United States is one of only a few countries that accepts large numbers of immigrants.

Australia, New Zealand, Switzerland, and Canada are all currently experiencing rates of immigration much higher than ours, though. Numerous industrialized nations of Europe also have sizable foreign-born populations.

In absolute terms, however, **the United States takes in vastly more people than any other country.** About 16 percent of all of the immigrants in the world come to America, including 36 percent of those who relocate to a developed country.

Immigrants in Other Countries
(as a percentage of the total population, 1990)



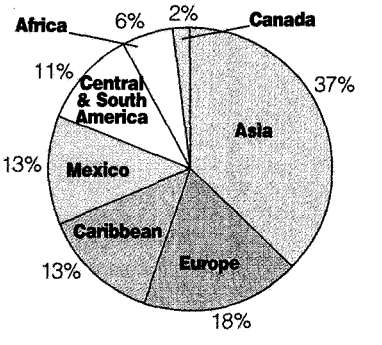
Source: Philip Martin & Jonas Widgren, *Population Bulletin*, April 1996.

A CHANGING MIX OF PEOPLES

When Ellis Island served as the chief entry point for immigrants to the United States, European newcomers made up at least 80 percent of all arrivals. **Today, less than 20 percent of new arrivals hail from Europe.**

Immigrants are more likely to come from Mexico than any other single country. About 30 percent of all U.S. immigrants are Latin Americans (including Mexicans), and well over one-third are Asians.

Origins of U.S. Immigrants, 1995



Source: U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service.

This demographic overhaul, combined with the growing *number* of immigrants, has sparked much talk about the United States becoming a country where non-whites could compose a majority by the middle of the next century. But population predictions are notoriously inaccurate, and the accuracy of this one depends upon what immigration laws and intermarriage patterns look like in the future.

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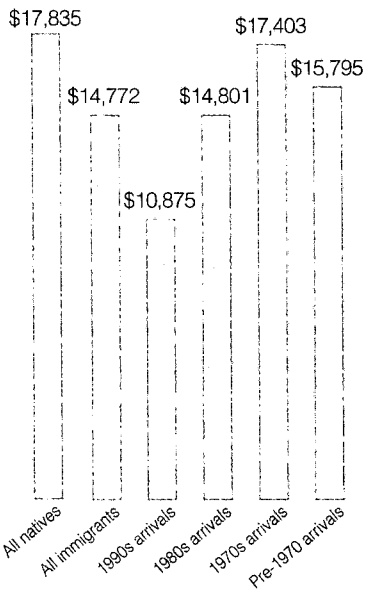
ECONOMIC ASSIMILATION OF IMMIGRANTS

One of the immigration debate's critical questions concerns the productivity of the foreign-born after their arrival. According to the latest government data, **the median personal income of immigrants is only 83 percent of what typical natives earn.**

This is mainly because recent arrivals tend to work at low-paying jobs. The longer immigrants live in the United States, the more they make. **Immigrants who arrived in the 1970s have incomes on par with natives today,** suggesting that it takes about two decades for economic assimilation to occur. Because immigrant households typically contain more workers, however, the gap between natives and immigrants in terms of household income closes in about half that time.

(The reduced income of the pre-1970 arrivals is explained by the fact that this group includes many retirees.)

Median Personal Income, 1995



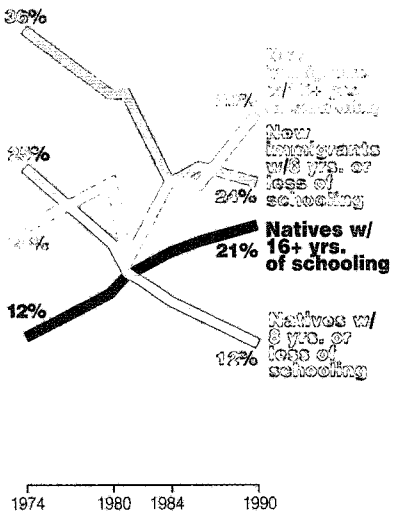
Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census.

EDUCATION: A SPLIT VERDICT

Perhaps the most important reason new immigrants earn much less income than natives is language. The ability to speak English is enormously important to economic success.

Another critical factor is education. Our current immigrants tend to be either very poorly educated or very well educated. **They are more likely than natives to lack high school diplomas, and also more likely to hold graduate degrees.** The education levels of new arrivals have improved over time, but they have not kept pace with native improvements. This has made it possible for both sides of the immigration debate to make self-serving claims about the so-called quality of today's immigrants compared with those from a generation ago.

Education Levels of Immigrants vs. Natives



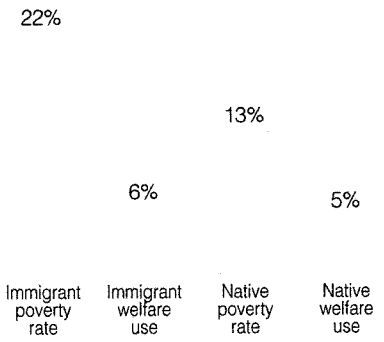
Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census.

POVERTY AND WELFARE

Although immigrants are much more likely than natives to live in poverty, they are only slightly more likely to receive public assistance. About a quarter of impoverished immigrants go on the dole, compared to more than a third of the native-born.

Immigrant welfare usage is driven upwards by two sub-populations—refugees and the elderly—that commonly receive public assistance. Researchers at the Urban Institute have suggested that **working-age immigrants who aren't refugees are actually less likely to be on welfare than working-age natives.** Immigrant welfare use may drop in the future, due to new restrictions on payments to non-citizens that were included in the recent national welfare reform.

Poverty and Welfare, 1996

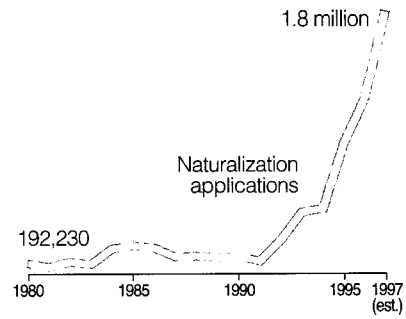


Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census.

HURRIED NATURALIZATION

Record numbers of immigrants are pursuing citizenship. Reasons for this include the welfare reforms mentioned above; the INS's new $75 fee for renewal of a green card (leading some immigrants to apply for citizenship at $95 instead); a growing number of people who are eligible to apply for naturalization due to 1980s amnesties for illegal aliens; plus some corner, cutting by political and activist groups eager to make more immigrants eligible to vote.

The Rush to Citizenship



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census.

—John J. Miller, vice president of the Center for Equal Opportunity in Washington, D.C., has a book on Americanization coming out early next year.

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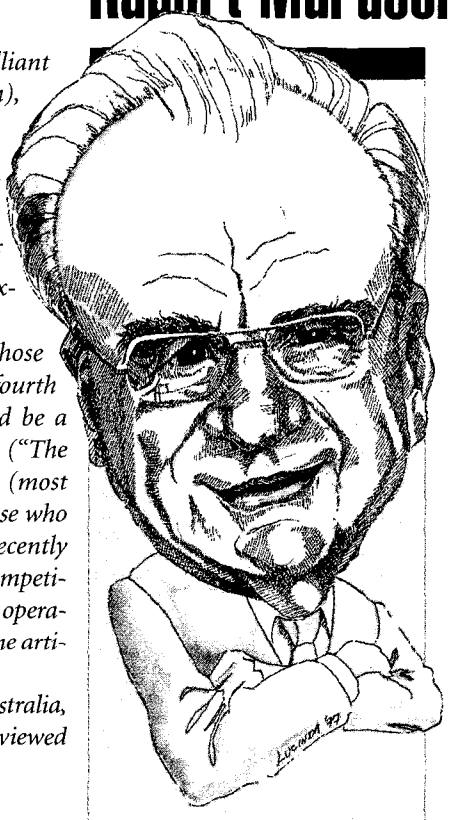
"Live with TAE"

A MEDIA MAGNATE DEFENDS HIS LATEST VENTURE IN TELEVISION NEWS, AS WELL AS HIS NEWSPAPERS AND TV SHOWS—BELOVED BY THE COMMON MAN, BUT NOT THE CRITICS.

Rupert Murdoch



Rupert Murdoch has been called both brilliant and vulgar (sometimes by the same person), but one thing no one can deny: He is the world's pre-eminent press baron. His newspapers, which include The Times *of London,* The Australian, *and the* New York Post, *have a combined readership of over 60 million, and his empire is rapidly expanding into television.*

Murdoch's Fox TV Network stunned those pundits who believed there would be a fourth member of the Trinity before there would be a fourth network. Fox's mixture of the superb ("The Simpsons," "The X-Files") and the sordid (most everything else) has made it a target for those who want to clean up television. Murdoch recently launched the Fox News Channel as a CNN *competitor, though he has had trouble getting cable operators to carry it. (For more on Fox News, see the article beginning on page 41.)*

Rupert Murdoch, born and raised in Australia, became a U.S. citizen in 1985. He was interviewed by TAE *editor-in-chief Karl Zinsmeister.*

TAE: Studies show that something like eight out of ten reporters at elite media organizations describe themselves as on the left of the political spectrum, compared to only a minor portion of the U.S. population. Clearly, this affects the slant of news coverage. Fox News says it is going to avoid that particular problem. How?

MURDOCH: By trying to make sure that we be fair. We are not trying to balance the Left with an exclusively right-wing viewpoint, but we are watching in every way we can that the presentations of Fox News are as objective as possible.

TAE: My own experience with news organizations is that, whatever the policies and principles at top, much of the actual content—the choice of topics and guests, the questions asked—comes from unseen, mid-level producers, guest-bookers, and so forth. Anyone starting a fresh news network today is necessarily going to be hiring most of his mid-level people away from existing TV networks. How is Fox News going to prevent these people from bringing the prevailing newsroom biases into its operation?

MURDOCH: I don't think we employ those sort of people. Roger Ailes keeps a very close watch on that.

TAE: How important to the identity of the Fox News Network is this attempt to avoid bias? Is that your main selling point?

MURDOCH: Yes. We were just having a debate—whether everything should be totally objective or whether we should allow people from the Left and people from the Right to have separate sessions, so that there is more equal time, but give everybody a little bit more, should we say, red meat to their own liking. So far, we have kept everything right down the middle. You can never claim perfection in these things.

TAE: Given that there are already several national news networks, is it your niche to be unusual in terms of ideological objectivity?

MURDOCH: Absolutely.

TAE: You are still very much in the launch phase, having gone on the air in September?

MURDOCH: Yes, that's right. We're new and we were first let down by Time Warner, who led us to believe that they were going to carry us, which gave us very optimistic expectations that were dashed at the last minute. Since I have announced that we are going to put Fox News on satellite, there has certainly been, should we say, a tightening up against us by the cable clan. I expect that will relax as we expand our audience. We expect to be in 25 million homes relatively quickly. That's certainly enough to get word of mouth going. I think once demand builds up, cable managers tend to find room for you.

TAE: So satellite will get your foot in the door, but your ultimate aspiration is to be on cable?

MURDOCH: We want to be everywhere, whether it be by satellite or by cable.

TAE: Are any of the cable folks telling you you are five years too late, we already have CNN and MSNBC and too many news options already?

If you're producing things that the people aren't reading, you're wasting your time.

Illustration by Lucinda S. Levine

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MURDOCH: No, they don't really. Some of them are saying that they don't want any news options; that there's no demand for news; that people want more old movies.

Well, I don't think either is true. In times of relative quiet, people don't watch a lot of news. But surveys are showing an average of 200-240,000 people watching CNN at any one time. Whereas, with us, there's probably only 40-50,000 watching at any moment in the 20 million homes that can get us. Over a day, that's several hundred thousand viewers. But no one watches a news channel all day long. So, we think we've got our foot in the door and we will expand it.

And having just gone on the air with a news show like "Fox Sunday Morning" we're already getting a million homes watching. We are pleased with the program; we will start promoting that actively, and we expect that to double very quickly.

TAE: One person I interviewed said that one of the advantages you have is that while CNN underwent its growing pains in public, with lots of people giggling about how amateurish it was at first, you have worked out a lot of the kinks in advance and are now working out the rest while your audience is still small. You will therefore have a high degree of professionalism by the time that you are seen by most people.

MURDOCH: I think we're very professional already. It's really looking excellent. We spent a lot of money on equipment and people to get that right. When CNN started, it was an entirely new pioneering effort and it was coming out of Atlanta, which is pretty difficult. Cheap, but difficult. They did it for much less money than what it is costing us. We're doing it in New York on a professional basis.

TAE: You mentioned that one of the big obstacles that Fox News has faced so far has been opposition from Time-Warner.

MURDOCH: Who own CNN, of course.

TAE: Has this experience changed your view of Ted Turner as a business competitor, or has it confirmed old views?

MURDOCH: Well, his unpleasant public statements have changed my views, have surprised me. But he is an extremely vigorous competitor. That's been true all his life, whether in sports or television or anything.

TAE: Has he been a fair competitor in this case?

MURDOCH: No, I think that he's been wrong about this because his executives, including his chairman, personally led me to believe that they were signing up with us.

TAE: Is that a reversible decision?

I think the move to a European Federation is madness. It tries to kill a thousand years of history in one blow.

MURDOCH: Oh, sure, they could reverse it tomorrow if they wanted. And we haven't given up. We are pursuing them in the courts and going through all that, but it'll take a long time.

TAE: What do you say to conservatives who tell you they are a little skeptical that Fox News will be more balanced and more representative of middle America, on the grounds that, on the entertainment side, Fox Television has introduced new levels of coarseness in language, sexuality, and so forth into TV?

MURDOCH: First of all, the Fox entertainment network and Fox News don't go together. Secondly, Hollywood is a very different and very difficult place. And I think if you watch the development of Fox over the last three or four years, since I've been there full-time, you would find that criticism to be not quite so true.

TAE: Do you prefer that evolution away from coarser material?

MURDOCH: Yes. You know, it's very difficult. These things are very subjective. Some people think that some shows are terrible, others like them. Whereas, I would argue, it's all quite harmless. I mean, except down into children's shows. There's nothing more violent than watching the news. I was just watching the rout of the hostage-takers in Peru. That could frighten children. It could frighten anyone. But no one is suggesting that should be kept off television.

TAE: We had an interview about a year ago with Conrad Black, a publisher who competes with you in many places, including in England, where he puts out the *Daily Telegraph*. He expressed enormous admiration for your savvy as a business competitor. Then he also said: "Rupert Murdoch is a cynic who thinks that the average member of the public is essentially a slob, and the lower you pitch to him, the better he likes it." How would you respond?

MURDOCH: I disagree with him enormously. I certainly think that there are times when Conrad has his head in the clouds. He is an elitist. He is a very good publisher, but I'm not ashamed to publish popular newspapers, or to court the greater and larger public. They deserve being communicated with and being given the news as much as anybody else. I don't think that is a matter of cynicism. I think it's a matter of public duty.

His London paper is much more cynical in that they publish all the filthiest court cases in the world, things which we would never publish in our popular papers, but they use very small type. I don't know what made Conrad annoyed with me that day.

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TAE: This populist versus elitist perspective is a striking aspect of your business achievement—you have in the same portfolio very high-brow, high-toned publications and also very popular, often crassly popular, outlets as well. Do you ever become confused when you wake up in the morning as to which audience you're serving?

MURDOCH: No. Take a paper like the *Sunday Times* in London—which I would brashly, perhaps, but unashamedly claim to be the best newspaper in the English language at the moment. It has a tremendous mixture of reading and some very great writing in it, but if you want to call it elitist, I understand very well. On the other side I also own a very brash paper like *The Sun,* which is accused often of bad taste. But it is read and enjoyed by 12 million people a day who otherwise wouldn't read any newspaper at all.

We wouldn't use the same writers in both papers, obviously.

Here in the U.S., the *New York Post*—though people used to like to put it down—is, I think, respected and has tremendous influence. We're not frightened of using a big headline. We have to; we have to sell on the street and other newsstands, and it's a very hard struggle.

TAE: Has it been your pattern that you don't try to dictate editorial policy? The *London Times* more or less endorsed the Labour Party in Britain's May election, didn't it?

MURDOCH: I don't interfere with the *Times* or the *Sunday Times* in that. Talking and listening to the editor, I think he's driven very much by a policy of Euro-skepticism, as are all our papers. I am much more deeply involved in policy for *The Sun.* There we came out in support of Labor for the first time in almost 25 years.

TAE: How important is it to you that you do not find odious things in your newspapers or on your TV programs? To what extent do you monitor the content?

MURDOCH: I don't monitor it enough. I should monitor it more. It's a matter of how many hours there are in a day. I've been known to complain very loudly sometimes.

TAE: Could you give us an example of that?

MURDOCH: No, because it would be unfair, but I've certainly done it with *The Sun.* I certainly did it with one or two things on Fox Television in the early days. I got after a particularly dreadful appearance by Michael Jackson on one occasion.

But so much is subjective. Take a show like "Married With Children," which is coming to the end of a 10- or 11-year run. I have to admit there's a lot of bad taste in it. But I also have to say that it's very, very funny. It's a functioning family. And I've been known to laugh out loud at it.

We censor the films that we put on Fox very hard. You may not think so looking at them. But compare them to HBO, where they're uncut.

It is low-brow entertainment, if you like. But there's nothing wrong with that. You know, television is watched by the masses, and the networks are having a tremendous struggle trying to hold their share of the audience against what's on cable.

We censor the films that we put on very hard. You may not think so looking at them. But compare them to HBO, where they're absolutely uncut. We have strong standards people, watching what they consider acceptable and not acceptable.

TAE: On those occasions when you do exercise some judgment or make your feelings known, do the newsroom people or the creative people have fits over you trying to intervene?

MURDOCH: No. I'm the one who gets his face in the newspapers and gets criticized for what they do. It's only fair that I should be heard on the matter.

TAE: You mentioned the difficulty of monitoring because of constraints on your time.

MURDOCH: What you have to do is appoint editors you can trust.

TAE: How well do you know your editors at your major properties? Would you hire someone to be the new editor or editorial page editor at the *New York Post* without having spent some serious time with him or her?

MURDOCH: Well, we've just appointed someone to the editorial page job, but he was the deputy there for some years beforehand. So we knew his work. We respected it and trusted it. I think I had lunch with him once or twice before confirming the appointment. Just to study one of the things we differ on, but can live with each other on.

But in terms of the editor who produces that whole paper, he's someone who has worked with me for 20 years.

TAE: Let's go backwards a little bit. Do you know any of the people who actually put out "Married With Children"?

MURDOCH: No. I've met the actors. I've met one of the producers. Hollywood doesn't work like that. We don't even make the show at our own studios. It's made by Sony.

But what is worse, a crude joke in "Married With Children" or the things that you see on soap operas at three in the afternoon on the big networks—where there is more than suggestive behavior for two or three hours every day, at times when any kid coming home from school is free to watch? That has been going on for years and years and years. Is that a bad thing? I'm inclined

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to think that most things are excusable if they're funny.

TAE: Not a bad rule.

MURDOCH: You've got to realize that, here and there, we may give offense to people.

TAE: Do you have favorite journalists that you disagree with but you find hard to disrespect?

MURDOCH: I read and very often disagree with but enjoy the work of Maureen Dowd of the *New York Times*. The same can be said of Bill Safire, although I'm more inclined to be agreeing with him, but sometimes not. But his is very original work and very well written.

I could give you quite different examples of writers in Britain. Happily, most of the ones I enjoy work for us, but unfortunately not all of them.

TAE: Are there journalists who just drive you nuts?

MURDOCH: Yeah, but then I don't read them. Life is too short to be reading Tony Lewis.

TAE: You must have sentimental favorites amongst your many media interests and properties. Are there shows on your television network that you think are really enjoyable, clever, funny?

MURDOCH: Using the word sentimental would be, perhaps, wrong, but I really think some of our work is very good. I think "The Simpsons" is an absolutely brilliant, brilliant comedy. Some people think it's subversive, but it's a very intelligently written comedy.

Then we've just started a new thing called "King of the Hill," which is much broader, which I think is very funny and well done. I'll go on from that to something like "The X-Files," which I have to say I think is brilliant drama. I don't always like it, but it is brilliantly executed.

TAE: There is a big flap now over foreign involvement in U.S. politics. Should we worry about foreign involvement in the U.S. media? If it's worrisome that Indonesians or Chinese would give money to politicians, is it worrisome that they might own American news outlets?

MURDOCH: I don't think they're going to have any influence. It's amusing. I'm an American citizen and have been for many years and consider myself an American. But opposing newspapers always print that I'm an Australian and a foreigner. But that's life. Interestingly, even in Australia, I'm treated as a foreigner. We're currently running into some difficulties with regulations about foreign ownership of the media.

I owned the *New York Post* before I became an American citizen, but I certainly wasn't promoting anything un-American there. Governments and politicians always yearn for control of the media. But look at the examples. Take Conrad Black, the Canadian, who owns media properties in the U.S., Britain, and elsewhere. There are by now quite significant French investments in British television. I can't point to any harm from any of those situations, or any influence being used to change government policies for reasons of international politics. I think if that happened, it would be exposed so quickly that the credibility of those organs would just disappear.

The Fox entertainment network and the Fox News Channel don't go together. Hollywood is a very different and very difficult place.

TAE: You are in an industry where having your finger on the public pulse and understanding public taste is really the key to success or failure. Have you ever found that not having grown up in this country made it harder for you to understand why a given thing or publication or show would be popular, while another wasn't?

MURDOCH: No. You learn as you go along. America is interesting. In a lot of areas American humor is different from that of other countries. In Britain, for instance, satirical shows that really send up the British way of life can be very popular. Something like that here, you have to be very, very careful with, certainly in print. Americans are not as good at laughing at themselves as the British are.

American drama is made for television. So it does exceedingly well around the world and gets great audiences. But comedy doesn't travel as well. American comedies very seldom work abroad.

The comedies here are getting a little broader now, but we went through a period where every comedy had to be politically correct. It was sort of the Norman Lear period. I don't mean to be personal about it, but he was doing shows like "Maude" and so on that fell absolutely flat when they traveled the world.

TAE: You have succeeded in lots of places under different circumstances. Do you consider yourself an internationalist? Or do you think of yourself as an American? Or an Australian?

MURDOCH: Oh, an American, an American citizen.

TAE: You gave a lecture in Melbourne in 1995 in which you argued that the spread of technology was dissolving the importance of nations.

MURDOCH: I've forgotten that, but I certainly think that is true. There are still great national cultures, of course—though you might feel that less in this country because we're such a mix of different migrants. That's why I think the move to a European Federation is madness. It tries to kill a thousand years of history in one blow.

But the spread of instant information is making the world a very different place. We see it in the reduced power of governments, for instance.

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And central bankers in various nations are certainly less powerful than they were. Just ask them.

TAE: The personalities of nations still come into play in world events. Why are there, for instance, no international media moguls coming out of Japan today?

MURDOCH: Oh, I don't know. There is of course Mr. Idei of Sony—they are running a big movie and television operation in this country. Hollywood has been very happy to take their money.

TAE: To take Sony's money, yes. But they fell down badly in creative judgment. Where you have not.

MURDOCH: Well, they did at the beginning. They've now put new people in there and changed things. We'll see how that goes.

There are major personalities in the Japanese media industry. But have they taken themselves around the world? No, they haven't. They certainly aren't here, and not in Europe, not I think even much around Asia.

TAE: One of the few Asians who has media influence in this country is the Reverend Sun Myung Moon, owner of the *Washington Times* and other properties. What sort of relations do you have with him?

MURDOCH: I've never met the Reverend Moon.

TAE: What do you think of his media properties?

MURDOCH: I'm mystified. I think the *Washington Times* does a fantastically good job on small resources. He's devoted tremendous resources to it by anybody's standards. They must be working hard, for it's all done at a fraction of the editorial budget of the *Washington Post* or other major American newspapers. Yet, time and again, they break very good stories and they're very consistent. I don't see it every day but I see it when I'm in Washington.

It is said that his church's association holds him back and hurts his credibility as a publisher. I would have said that, if there were evidence that they were pushing a particular agenda. But when I pick the paper up, I don't see the agenda.

The main problem facing the *Washington Times* is that once a newspaper like the *Post* becomes dominant, it is unassailable as a natural monopoly. The only competition, if you can call it that, is in the local television station.

TAE: You seem to take energetic personal interest in your newspapers, even though some people say they represent yesterday's technology, some day to go the way of the Edsel.

MURDOCH: I don't believe that.

TAE: What is the source of your attachment to newspapers? Is it because they make business sense? Do you just like the role they play in a nation?

In Britain, satirical shows that send up the British way of life can be very popular. In America, you have to be very, very careful. Americans are not as good at laughing at themselves.

MURDOCH: All of those things. They are not just business. I guess I've been in them all of my life and I find the role of publishing a newspaper the most satisfying and enjoyable thing that anybody could do in life. It's less profitable than some other things. But it's more exciting and more interesting and more urgent, and, I think, has more effect than running a television station.

TAE: I've got a fascinating admission there. Rupert Murdoch is interested in a lot more than profit.

MURDOCH: It would be very easy to hide and say I'm only interested in profit and loss. But I'm interested in the world of ideas and what is going on, and what can be done to change things.

TAE: With all the practical demands on your time, how does one also follow journalists and arguments and politics and take an interest in arcane intellectual ideas?

MURDOCH: I probably don't do well enough. I'm spread a bit thin.

TAE: Is your interest in ideas avocational or is it central to your work?

MURDOCH: Absolutely, it must be central. I mean, if you're producing things that the people aren't reading, you're wasting your time. Even employing all the best managers in the world, you have to understand the world around you yourself.

TAE: Give me some examples of how you tell—other than through Nielsen ratings or what your employees tell you—when some new thing is interesting or important or sparking public interest.

MURDOCH: You apply your own taste to it. It's judgment. Sometimes you may be wrong, but you can, for instance, judge one newspaper against another. Judging what will be a successful motion picture is something different altogether, and more difficult.

TAE: But terribly important. One bad mistake and you're in big trouble.

MURDOCH: We make them regularly.

TAE: Are you ever able to get yourself into a theater with regular people and see what they like?

MURDOCH: Of course.

TAE: You're not so much of a public figure that it's impossible for you to be anonymous and to interact with people in that way?

MURDOCH: No, no, no, I go to affairs.

TAE: Do you ever do a "Prince and the Pauper" and put on a fake mustache so you can observe things unnoticed?

MURDOCH: No.

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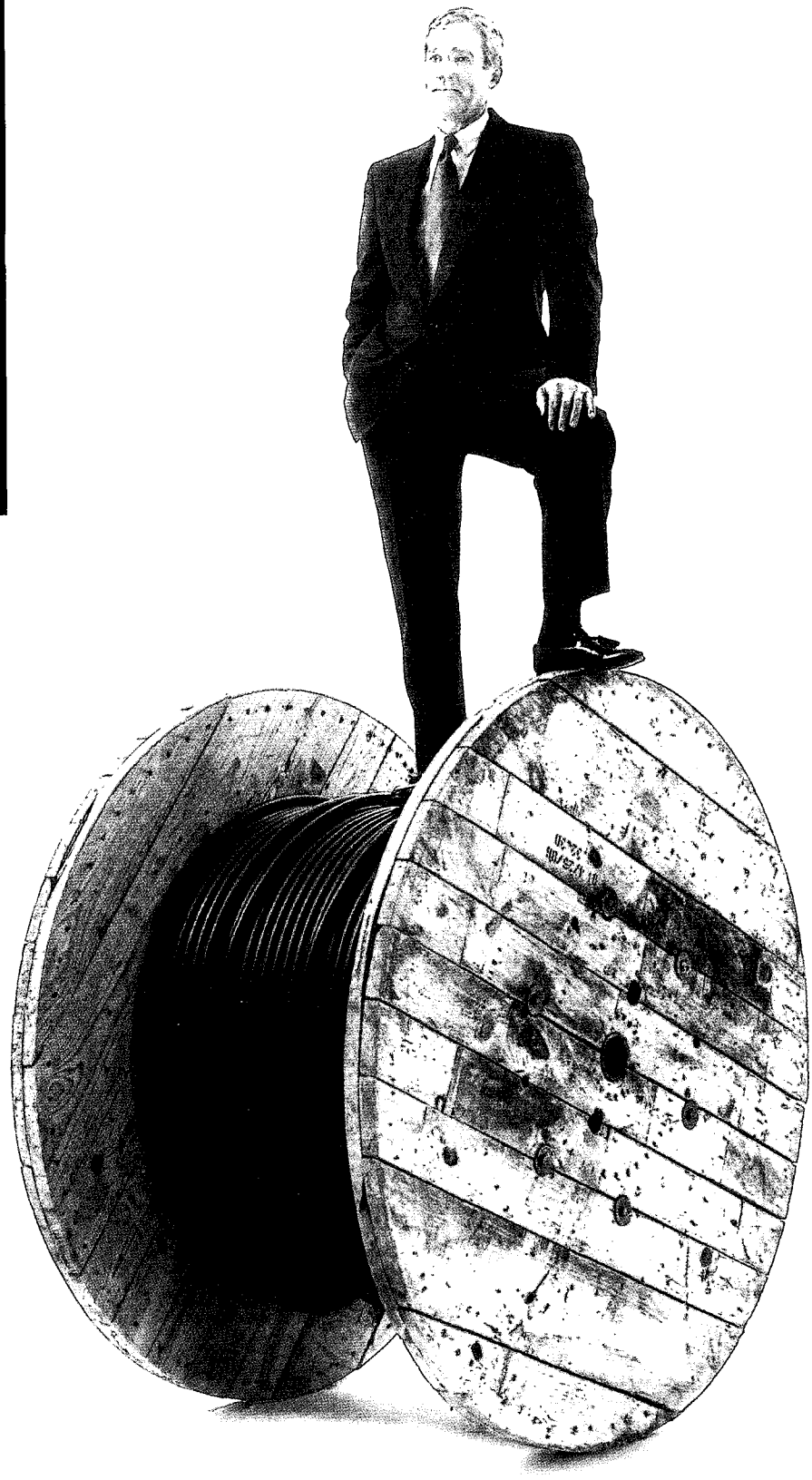

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It used to be that rejecting the views of one's parents meant veering to the left. No more. Come meet the new...

Rebel Children

By Kenneth Lee

When a young Hillary Rodham headed out for Wellesley College in fall 1965, she proudly described herself as a "Goldwater girl." But by the time she was graduated, her politics had been radicalized: She organized anti-war sit-ins on campus, campaigned for Eugene McCarthy, and considered herself a liberal Democrat.

Hillary's rebellion against the conservative beliefs of her parents was typical. Growing up in the relatively tranquil 1950s, many baby boomers asserted their independence by veering left. Indeed, it has become a cliché that younger generations invariably become liberal in defiance of their parents' conservatism.

But that isn't always the case. Like Alex P. Keaton in the television show "Family Ties," some young people move to the right to rebel against their parents' liberalism. Some of today's conservatives turned that way because they grew up during the 1960s and '70s amidst egregious excesses of liberalism. Others became right-wingers after a religious awakening. For many Generation Xers now reaching adulthood, separating from the 'rents also involves dumping Mom and Dad's smug baby-boomer liberalism.

Take Noah Silverman for example. A 26-year-old legislative assistant to Senator Bob Smith (R-N.H.), Silverman grew up in Ithaca, New York, a small college town that until recently had an avowed socialist as its mayor. During the 1960s, his parents were enamored of New Left politics. "My parents' philosophy was formed by people like [the radical social critic] Herbert Marcuse," says Silverman. "They are verbal and opinionated. When I was growing up, I was shaped by their political views because it was like the air your breathe—it was pervasive and influential."

Silverman followed his parents' footsteps. He attended an "alternative" school that eschewed grades and dedicated each Friday to non-academic activities. For his bar mitzvah gift, he took a political pilgrimage to Marxist Nicaragua. Two years later, he sojourned to Nicaragua again, but by then his disillusionment with leftist politics had begun to emerge. "It was a hothouse environment of bizarre political causes," he recalls. "In my tour group, there were 'Sandalistas'—sandal-wearing American Sandinista sympathizers—who would launch into earnest debate every time a conflict arose between one woman in our group and our Nicaraguan tour guide. They'd argue if we should back her because she was a woman, or back him because he was an oppressed Third World man and she was a Caucasian bourgeois American. That was the beginning of my reassessment. I asked myself if I wanted to

"Be careful what you say to my father—he's terribly old-fashioned."

Tevi Troy left page, Dan Troy right page

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be that far out and subscribe to such oddball ideas."

By the time he enrolled at Amherst College, Silverman had gradually moved right and considered himself a moderate. He held steadfastly to moral relativism, however—until he took a course on politics with noted conservative professor Hadley Arkes during his freshman year. The course challenged, and ultimately eroded, his faith in the idea that there are no absolutes. "Before, I was reflexively pro-choice because that's what you were supposed to be, and only a tacky person would discuss what's destroyed in an abortion," he explains. "But I realized that there are some moral truths that have the force of a mathematical truth."

Silverman's aversion to liberalism was reinforced during graduate school at Johns Hopkins, when his fellow students insisted on racial and sexual quotas in faculty hiring. It wasn't until 1994, though, that he finally declared himself a conservative Republican. As Clinton's national health care plan collapsed, Silverman read an article by David Frum in *Commentary* entitled, "It's Big Government, Stupid." He realized that "big government programs are changing the character of America." Opposing them is "not just about saving money or defeating Democratic initiatives. It's about trying to salvage the American character." He decided to become a foot soldier in the Republican revolution and began working for Senator Smith.

David Frum, author of the article that influenced Silverman, also comes from a liberal background. His parents were prominent Canadians: His father is a successful developer, and his mother—dubbed "Canada's Barbara Walters"—hosted a widely watched news program. And though his parents lived conservative lives, they were unflinchingly liberal in their politics.

Yet their liberal views never rubbed off on the young Frum. In fact, he had already begun edging right at the tender age of 14, when he read Alexander Solzhenitsyn's searing anti-Communist work *The Gulag Archipelago.* Yet Frum only developed a coherent conservative outlook when he went to Yale in 1978 and had the noted Cold Warrior Eugene Rostow as his faculty advisor. "A lot of people in Canada try to explain my politics by saying that I was reacting against where I came from, but that's not true," he says, "I was reacting against the times."

If the Vietnam War shaped an entire generation during the 1960s, the national malaise of the late '70s convinced many young people that liberalism was in its death throes. "The sudden surge in Soviet adventurism, and the apparent collapse in American will to resist it in the latter part of the Carter years, had a huge impact on me," says Frum. "Also, the international economy was breaking down. Every Western country soon learned that they couldn't continue the path they were on. Either they had to turn left to a totally planned economy, or they had to turn sharply away from that. Virtually every industrial country turned away."

Frum's tale of rebellion against a moribund liberalism is common. Brothers Dan and Tevi Troy grew up in New York City, where their parents were Democratic Jewish public school teachers. "In New York City," says Tevi, "Jews wouldn't think about voting anything other than Democratic." Today, both Troy brothers are conservative activists. Tevi, 29, works at the House Republican Policy Committee, while his older brother Dan—who clerked for Judge Robert Bork and served in the Reagan and Bush Justice Departments—is an associate scholar at the American Enterprise Institute.

"My mother often asks me why I became a Republican," says Dan. "Well, I grew up in New York City in the 1970s, and if there ever were an example of government that didn't work, it was New York City. It was the highest-taxed jurisdiction in the country, yet it was going broke, the streets weren't plowed, crime was rampant, subways were unsafe, and the garbage was never picked up. When you grow up with signs of government failure all around you, why in the world would you believe that the government will solve our problems?"

The Troys' parents continue to be perplexed by their offspring. When the two brothers lived together in Virginia, Dan remembers their mother visiting: "My mom, who attended Yiddish socialist camps as a child, walked into our place and said, 'My two sons—Republicans—living together in the cradle of the Confederacy. Oy vey! Where have I gone wrong!'"

Many young people discover themselves to be conservative during their college years. Sometimes, a particular mentor influences their outlook. Seth Leibsohn, a third-year law school student at Northeastern University, grew up in a Democratic family in Phoenix. His mother and father raised money for liberal political candidates and participated in the civil rights movement. Not surprisingly, Seth considered himself a liberal and decided to attend Pitzer College partly because the small liberal arts school was known for its leftism.

During his sophomore year, Leibsohn attended a lecture by Harry Jaffa, who taught at Claremont McKenna, a nearby sister school. Led by a left-leaning professor, campus gay groups protested by leaving *en masse* during Jaffa's lecture. Leibsohn penned a column on this event for the college newspaper: "I took an ACLUish position. I basically condemned Jaffa" for criticizing the gay agenda, "but I also wrote that he has a right to speak and that the gay groups shouldn't have cowered from open discussion."

Jaffa read Leibsohn's column and challenged him to a debate. Although Leibsohn did not take up Jaffa's offer, he went to the professor's office to introduce himself. When they met, he was overwhelmed by Jaffa's intellectual prowess. Before long, the two became close personal friends, and Jaffa convinced him to stay at Claremont for a master's degree on Abraham Lincoln's political philosophy. "Before Jaffa, I never had an intelligent perspective on conservatism," explains Leibsohn. "He is an absolutely brilliant man, and he convinced me to become conservative."

Kenneth Lee, who writes often for The American Enterprise, *has also contributed to* The New Republic, Heterodoxy, *and other publications.*

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Like Leibsohn, Adam Dubitsky is a young conservative on the move: He founded his own political consulting business a couple of years ago, after working with right-wing bigwigs like Pete DuPont, Arianna Huffington, and the NRA. Dubitsky has also started his own PAC to promote Social Security privatization. Yet Dubitsky was born in the cradle of modern liberalism, New York City, and his father works at ABC News. The people the family socialized with "got most of their information from the *New York Times* or NPR, and they had no exposure to mainstream America," Dubitsky explains. "For example, you ask one of our liberal family friends what causes crime and you hear 'poverty' and 'guns.' The rest of the country responds 'bad values' and 'poor upbringing.'"

Dubitsky's political epiphany came during college when his sociology professor attacked the family as oppressive to women and children. "You were not supposed to question the ideas, or else you were morally inferior," he notes. "For many people like me, when you're in high school or college, you just can't put the words together to defend conservatism because you haven't been exposed to enough of it. But so much of what is said around you just doesn't seem right."

Most rebel children end up toiling outside of politics. Scott Engelhart is a hard-working stone mason whose powerful frame is topped by shock of red hair. His father was a New York English professor, his mother a George McGovern delegate. He spent time smoking pot as a teenager and absorbed the liberal views of his parents. Today, he builds stone walls, houses, and walkways to the accompaniment of Rush Limbaugh on his portable radio.

Engelhart says his adult political views came to him fairly late, growing out of the responsibilities of life, work, paying taxes, and raising children, as well as a deepening of his faith. "Before, my opinions weren't based on facts, or the realities of a situation," he observes. "The Left talks so much about the importance of feelings and self-esteem. I've learned that those oh-so-elusive good feelings are created by personal effort and responsibility—and not government fiat, as the Left says."

"My parents are willing to create a gray area for people who've done something wrong," notes Engelhart, "while I see wrong and right as finite in areas like murder, lying, and teen pregnancy." When Engelhart's parents, to whom he remains close, learned that Scott and one of his brothers were voting for Ronald Reagan, they were shocked. "For a while, family political conversations were a little weird. But now we can tease each other about what we each view as the other person's political insanity."

The right-rebel child phenomenon transcends national boundaries. Roger Scruton, a prominent Tory philosopher in Britain and editor of the *Salisbury Review,* discovered conservatism during his college years. Scruton's father was a Labour Party socialist, but at Cambridge Scruton discovered literature by the likes of T.S. Eliot and soon came to "the conception of England as blessed with a history which I couldn't or wouldn't want to remake in accordance to an egalitarian agenda."

When Scruton visited Paris in 1968 after his graduation, he was repulsed by the nihilism of the leftist student movement there. "I immediately sympathized with the bourgeois sentiment embodied by DeGaulle, and had a loathing for the revolutionary activity and the whole egalitarian program—which I viewed as throwing away our cultural inheritance," he told TAE. Asked how common he thinks his story is, Scruton quips, "I do believe people become more conservative as they mature. But the problem is that the '60s made sure people don't mature."

Some young people become conservatives the old-fashioned way: They enter the workforce, and fiscal reality tempers their quixotic liberalism. Take Roy Marden for instance. Marden is currently the Manager of Industry Affairs at Philip Morris, where he works with think tanks to advocate fiscally conservative policies like lower taxes and less government regulation. His current job stands in marked contrast to his liberal background: He grew up in a staunchly Democratic household where his mother was a public school teacher actively involved in union politics. His liberal views were reinforced when he studied economics at Northwestern University, a bastion of Keynesian liberalism.

After graduation, he worked at an economic consulting firm retained by IBM in its antitrust battle with the Justice Department. "Most people saw IBM as the big gorilla, but once you saw their records from the inside, you knew that they didn't have all this power—other companies were competing fiercely with IBM," Marden explains. "As a result of the government regulatory action, all this money went to the legal establishment for something like 13 years, and it diverted IBM from its high-tech development. This was my first real-world experience on how government intervention can sometimes be harmful to society."

At the same time, Marden began reading classical liberal economic works by Friedrich von Hayek and Ludwig von Mises. "These were books that we never learned in school, and the more I read them, the more they made sense," he says. "Both my practical experience and these books helped me gradually become a libertarian conservative."

Adam Goldin is another person who discovered conservatism through his work. This 28-year-old welfare researcher

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His atheism began to fail him when he started reading G. K. Chesterton and C. S. Lewis. "Once you begin to see the world as not perfectible, you get to be less liberal." Smith explains.

grew up in a traditional Democratic family and followed his parents' political outlook. "Growing up in the 1980s, I always heard that Reagan was a fool, that his administration was corrupt and hurt the poor. And I believed it," he says.

As late as 1992 he was a Democrat and voted for Bill Clinton. But after graduate school, he took a job at the Hudson Institute. "I was afraid that Hudson might be too far to the right of me, but I was always interested in welfare issues," he explains. He became part of the team that designed Governor Tommy Thompson's "Wisconsin Works" welfare reform, which has reduced the state caseload by half [see "Work not Welfare in Wisconsin," Sept./Oct. 1995]. This experience opened his eyes. "I saw how people became indolent because of the welfare system," he says. "We need more accountability for our own actions. Poor choices ought to result in poor consequences."

As a firm supporter of entitlement reform, Goldin frequently clashes with his baby-boomer mom and dad, who voted for Bill Clinton and Ralph Nader, respectively, in 1996. "Irving Kristol said that a neoconservative is a liberal who has been mugged by reality," notes Goldin. "That's what happened to me. I've come to realize that liberalism is a big disaster."

What happens when your father is not only a liberal, but one of the most prominent liberal political philosophers in the country? Ask Alec Rawls, a Ph.D. candidate in economics at Stanford and son of the famous Harvard professor John Rawls. Although the elder Rawls is very circumspect on day-to-day political issues, his magnum opus *The Theory of Justice* provides a philosophic justification for the welfare state, and modern liberals have adopted him enthusiastically. Alec, on the other hand, is a free-market maven who excoriates the welfare state as both unconstitutional and insane.

Alec downplays the political differences between himself and his dad, insisting their conceptions of moral philosophy are at the core quite similar. He concludes, however, that his father's "principles of justice" err in their emphasis on equalizing the human condition. "Most of those who consider themselves my father's followers embrace equality as an ultimate end or value in itself. That is the source of the politics of resentment that characterizes the illiberal Left."

"I think my parents had a naïve optimism in the 1960s, and thought that just by going after the problems of poverty they would be competently resolved," notes the younger Rawls. "I don't think my father was aware—as we are all aware now—of what goes wrong when we give government too much power." Alec, who has worked as a carpenter to pay for both his undergraduate and graduate education, holds a more pessimistic view of government. "I love carpentry, but the government does idiotic things with building codes and licenses. Licenses are a government-sponsored monopoly, and building codes do not let people do what they want to do with their own property," Rawls complains. "We need to use markets and individual choice over regulations, laws, and socialism."

Religion is another reason many conservatives reject their parents' liberalism. Lisa Schiffren has garnered impressive conservative credentials in her short career, working as a speechwriter for Vice President Dan Quayle (including penning his Murphy Brown speech), as an editorialist for the *Detroit News,* and as a Pentagon staffer. Now she stays home to raise her two-year-old daughter. "My husband—who's a dyed-in-the-wool conservative—and I live in mortal fear that our children will become liberals," she wisecracks.

But only a decade and a half ago Schiffren disdained traditional morality. Raised in Greenwich Village during the 1960s and '70s by liberal parents, she became involved in feminist politics at an early age. During junior high school, with help from the editors of *Ms.*, Schiffren sued the New York City Board of Education to allow girls to play baseball.

Schiffren underwent a cataclysmic change when she spent a year in Israel after college. There she discovered religion and abandoned her dalliance with feminism. "New York City then was a very libertine place, and everyone I knew was divorced," but she saw that "the sexual revolution led to misery rather than fulfillment, that divorce did not leave families better off and happier."

Like Schiffren, Scott Smith owes his conservatism to a religious awakening. A 27-year-old graduate student in international relations at Columbia, Smith was raised as an atheist by his liberal parents. His father was a doctor with the World Health Organization, and Scott lived in the Third World for much of his childhood. "When you grow up as I did, from country to country, it's natural to be a moral relativist, because it's the first defense mechanism," he says. And he was content to be without any religious moorings. "Even after my father died, I felt proud that I did not have to appeal to a deity to assuage my sorrow."

His atheism began to fail him, however, when he started reading G. K. Chesterton and C. S. Lewis. "Once you begin to see the world as not perfectible, you get to be less liberal," Smith explains. A friend ultimately helped him shed his atheism and become a practicing Catholic. They began discussing religion as an intellectual game, and Smith remembers writing in his journal that he would never be persuaded of religion's importance. "But I was dead wrong. My friend appealed to the intellect, using solid, rational arguments. You have to find where [religious doctrines] are wrong, or else accept them, and I couldn't find them wrong; so I began to believe," he says. His religious beliefs have influenced his politics. "*The Federalist Papers* got it right when it said that if men were angels, we wouldn't need a government," he notes, "but if men are more angel-*like*, we'll need less government."

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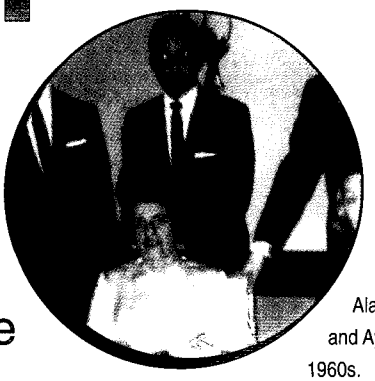
Alan Greenspan—Cultist?

The Fascinating Personal History of Mr. Pinstripe



Alan Greenspan and Ayn Rand in the 1960s.

By R. W. Bradford

Alan Greenspan's name first appeared in the *New York Times*, not as one might expect, in connection with politics or economics, but as the author of a 73-word letter to the editor of the *Times Book Review*. The future head of the Federal Reserve wrote to protest a hostile review of Ayn Rand's novel *Atlas Shrugged* that had appeared a few weeks earlier.

It was the fall of 1957. By this time, Greenspan had abandoned a career as a jazz saxophonist, earned a degree at New York University's School of Commerce, enrolled in and abandoned the Ph.D. program at Columbia, worked as staff economist with what today would be called a think tank, and become a partner in a Wall Street economic forecasting firm.

Alert readers noticed Greenspan's name in the *Times* again seven weeks later, this time in Lewis Nichols' column "In and Out of Books." The subject was a group of admirers of Ayn Rand, who gathered on Saturday evenings in Rand's living room "for discussions of philosophy." Greenspan is listed among members of the group and identified only as "an economic consultant."

Nichols described the group as a "class," though he noted that "uncouth outsiders" were apt to use the language of religion rather than education to describe it. That may have been the last time Rand's following was described as a class; as her acolytes grew in number and devotion, it gradually came to be treated as a religion and, increasingly, as a cult. At its head stood Nathaniel Branden, a psychotherapist 25 years Rand's junior. He lectured on Rand's philosophy of "Objectivism," co-edited (with Rand) *The Objectivist Newsletter* (later *The Objectivist*), and controlled access to Rand. He recently described the beliefs of the cult in these words: "Ayn Rand is the greatest human being who has ever lived. *Atlas Shrugged* is the greatest human achievement in the history of the world. Ayn Rand, by virtue of her philosophical genius, is the supreme arbiter of any issue pertaining to what is rational, moral, or appropriate to man's life on earth."

From its modest origin in the early 1950s, Rand's following grew rapidly. By the mid-1960s, over 20,000 copies of *The Objectivist* were selling each month, and people in more than 80 cities were gathering around tape recorders to listen raptly to Nathaniel Branden Institute lectures.

But all was not going well. Unbeknownst to everyone but their spouses, Rand and Branden had been having an affair since the mid-1950s, and by now Branden wanted out. This led to a bizarre chain of events, culminating with Rand calling Branden to her apartment, where she slapped him around and cursed him ("If you have an ounce of morality left in you, an ounce of psychological health, you'll be impotent for the next 20 years! And if you achieve any potency, you'll know its a sign of still worse moral degradation."). In the next issue of *The Objectivist*, she repudiated Branden "totally, permanently" because of a "disturbing change" in "his intellectual attitude," to wit, "a tendency toward non-intellectual concerns." She also charged him with poor management of their jointly owned publishing effort and detailed some of the events that had led to their split. She did not mention he had jilted her.

As I learned in hours of interviews with their associates, Greenspan was a member of Rand's inner circle during this entire period and beyond. He lectured on economics for the Nathaniel Branden Institute. He wrote for the first issue of *The Objectivist Newsletter*, and when Rand broke with Branden, he signed a public statement condemning the traitor "irrevocably." When Gerald Ford appointed him to the Council of Economic Advisors, he invited Rand to his swearing-in ceremony, and attended her funeral in 1982.

Greenspan was introduced to Rand by Joan Mitchell, a young woman he was dating. She was a friend of Barbara Weidman, Nathaniel Branden's fiancée and already a member of the group of young admirers who met in Rand's apartment. "I was not really able to interest him in Objectivism," Joan Mitchell Blumenthal recalls. She and Greenspan married, but quickly discovered they had little in common. It was only after their marriage was annulled that "he started showing up at Ayn's, a strange turn of events."

Greenspan and Rand didn't hit it off. According to Nathaniel Branden, he was philosophically a logical positivist and economically a Keynesian, both doctrines anathema to Rand. "How can you

Greenspan was Rand's special pet because he was older and in the business world, recalls Edith Efron, who joined the Collective a few years later.

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stand talking to him?" Rand asked Branden. "A logical positivist and a Keynesian? I'm not even certain it's moral to deal with him at all." (Barbara Branden doesn't remember it that way, and neither does Greenspan. She and Greenspan deny he was ever a Keynesian.)

Nathaniel Branden engaged Greenspan in some "very long and involved philosophical, metaphysical, epistemological, political, economic, and moral conversations," according to Barbara, which soon "had a profound effect upon him." He abandoned his positivism and Keynesianism, and soon, along with other members of the Collective (as the Rand's young acolytes ironically called themselves), he was reading chapters of *Atlas Shrugged* as it was being written.

"Alan became much warmer, more open, more available," recalls Barbara Branden. "I mean Alan will never be Mr. Warmth, that's just not his personality and nature. But the dourness, the grimness, the solemnity that he had when we first met him practically disappeared, I think, because he accepted us and knew that all of us including Ayn and Frank accepted him. It was like a family, it really was. And he was part of that family."

Not everyone shared Barbara's opinion. One member of the Collective recalls, "It's simply that he is a very cold person. It's very hard to know what's on his mind. Through those thick Coke-bottle glasses, you can't even tell that he's awake sometimes."

More than one member of the Collective marveled at his ability to attract beautiful women. "It was incredible how he always had a beautiful woman at his side," recalls Barbara Branden. "I think it was the attraction of his intellectual power and probably his reserve. You couldn't knock him over by batting your eyelashes at him. He certainly had a profound effect on women." Another member speculates: "Maybe he was a good kisser, from all those years as a saxophone player." His ex-wife Joan Mitchell Blumenthal offers a different explanation. "He is very clever, he knows a lot about a million things, and he has a wonderful sense of humor. Alan is charming and always interesting."

He remained the odd man out. Rand preferred people who were young and (as one member of the Collective remembers) "malleable." But she cut Greenspan some slack by virtue of his maturity and occupation. "He was her special pet, because he was older, and in the business world," recalls Edith Efron, who joined the Collective a few years later. "She didn't know anyone else very well who was a businessman. I think this was very important to her...she allowed him more intellectual liberty than she did other people."

One area where Greenspan was apparently permitted ideological deviation was economics. The "official" Objectivist theory of economics was the Austrian theory of Ludwig von Mises, which, among other tenets, holds that economic forecasting is impossible. The issue apparently wasn't discussed, but Greenspan continued his successful career as an economic forecaster after becoming involved with Rand. And he never, as one Collective member archly points out, "attended Ludwig von Mises seminars at New York University, despite ample opportunity." (Today, Greenspan describes himself as an "eclectic, free-market forecaster," who "generally agrees with Austrian economics.")

"He was different," Barbara Branden recalls. "Which was very wise of him. He kept his private life to himself, which the rest of us did not do." Another recalls he "used to come late to everything and leave early. And he had his own relationship with [Rand] which was dignified. And he kept somewhat aloof from everybody, which was a smart thing to do."

And he remained a puzzle to some. "Alan Greenspan is incredibly terse," one member told me, as if "everything he sends is a telegram and they're charging by the word. He's deliberately low-keyed and ponderous. On the other hand, he is a musician, so there obviously is a side of him that has passion and emotion, but...I would say he's very guarded. He must be a wonderful poker player."

Barbara Branden remembers this differently. "Alan had no talent for and no interest in small talk. So if people around him were engaged in small talk they wouldn't get anything from him. I mean that he would simply stand there and have nothing to contribute. But if there was something interesting, then he was very social."

Greenspan was unique among the Collective's older members. The first to join, he was virtually the only one not to be expelled. In 1957, economist Murray Rothbard read *Atlas Shrugged* and was enchanted. He wrote Rand an enthusiastic fan letter and was invited into her movement, only to be expelled less than a year later, ostensibly for plagiarism. Philosopher John Hospers, who never bought in to all of Rand's thinking on epistemology and metaphysics but was sufficiently sympathetic with her esthetics, ethics, and politics that he was a frequent guest at Collective gatherings, was expelled instantly in 1962 after he criticized Rand's address to the American Society for Esthetics, which he had arranged. Journalist Edith Efron, who had joined the Collective after she interviewed Rand for Mike Wallace's syndicated column, was expelled without explanation in 1967.

Greenspan's aloofness may have been one reason he survived. Coming to meetings late, leaving early, he wasn't very involved in the battles. John Hospers recalls that "he avoided talk about philosophical issues altogether," which also helped keep him above the battles. He was certainly aloof from the biggest battle of all, the battle between Rand and Nathaniel Branden in 1968. By this time, he was off working as a policy advisor to Richard Nixon, who was campaigning for president. He'd been recruited to the campaign in 1967 by Martin Anderson, who had become a peripheral member of Rand's coterie after reading *Atlas Shrugged* in the early 1960s. It turned out that an old friend of Greenspan was also involved in the campaign: Leonard Garment, who had managed the jazz band in which Greenspan had played back in the late '40s, had become Nixon's law partner and was working on the campaign. Greenspan quickly became a domestic and economic policy analyst for Nixon. When Rand and Branden split, Rand asked Greenspan to repudiate Branden publicly. Without ever speaking to Branden, he agreed.

After the 1968 campaign, Greenspan returned to economic forecasting in New York, refusing job offers from the Nixon administration. Six years later, President Ford offered him a position as chairman of the Council of Economic Advisors; Greenspan accepted. With Ford's defeat in 1977 he returned to private life, but

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was appointed by Ronald Reagan to head a special commission on Social Security in 1981. Since 1987 he has headed the Federal Reserve System.

From the start of his political career, questions have arisen about Greenspan's political beliefs. Shortly after his appointment to the Council of Economic Advisors, he was asked on "Meet the Press" whether he had changed his opinion, published years earlier in a Nathaniel Branden Institute pamphlet, that anti-trust laws ought to be abolished. He replied forthrightly that he continued to believe they should be, but he was well aware that such a move would be politically unpalatable for the foreseeable future.

Greenspan has also taken flack from other Randians for failing to implement policies that would radically free the economy. "Alan Greenspan, whatever his rationalization," John Ridpath of the Ayn Rand Institute told an interviewer for the Canadian Broadcasting Company, has "abandoned any philosophically principled stance" and "compromised himself and what he learned from Ayn Rand over and over."

Others accuse him of trying to implement those same policies in a deceitful manner. Journalist Michael Lewis recently wrote that Greenspan "has preserved a hard core of fanaticism, encasing it in a shell of pragmatism. No more waiting for everyone to realize that extreme laissez-faire capitalism is the best system: He's taking control of the process himself, ever so quietly." Only a few months earlier, Greenspan had recommended to a Senate committee that all economic regulations should have fixed lifespans. Senator Paul Sarbanes (D-Md.) accused him of "playing with fire, or indeed throwing gasoline on the fire," and asked him whether he favored a similar provision in the Fed's authorization. Greenspan coolly answered that he did. Do you actually mean, demanded the senator, that the Fed "should cease to function unless affirmatively continued?" "That is correct, sir," Greenspan responded. "All right," the senator came back, "the Defense Department?" "Yes."

The Senator could scarcely believe his ears. "Now my next question is, is it your intention that the report of this hearing should be that Greenspan recommends a return to the gold standard?" Greenspan responded, "I've been recommending that for years, there's nothing new about that.... It would probably mean there is only one vote in the Federal Open Market Committee for that, but it is mine." This may be the first time that advocating a policy on a nationally televised Senate committee meeting has been characterized as trying to implement a policy "ever so quietly."

Greenspan doesn't talk to the press as a matter of policy. But it appears he has tried to implement policy changes coherent with laissez-faire capitalism whenever it was possible, and he has articulated his case when given the opportunity. As Barbara Branden observes, "Alan believes in the art of the possible." And, as his friend Joan Mitchell Blumenthal has observed, "Alan is very devoted to Ayn. He still thinks of her most kindly."

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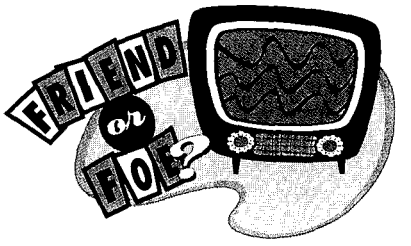
In Praise of Television



The Greatest TV Show Ever

A Shakespeare scholar lauds 'The Simpsons'

By Paul A. Cantor

Taking potshots at television has become all too easy. The boob-tube tends to flatten out reality, to oversimplify the human beings it presents to the point of caricature, and to rely on stereotypical situations for its plots. In short, television seems inherently cartoonish.

Fair enough. But this criticism implies that television at least ought to do one thing well: cartoons. And indeed we are living in the golden age of the television cartoon. The one certifiable new hit of the 1996-97 season was Fox's "King of the Hill," a cartoon created by Mike Judge of "Beavis and Butt-Head" fame. "The Tick," perhaps the wittiest of all TV cartoons, is, alas, no longer in production—its jokes about early Italian Renaissance painters like Giotto may have been a bit over the heads of its Saturday-morning target audience, but it survives in reruns.

Above all, there is "The Simpsons." This cartoon chronicle of life in Springfield, USA, may very well be the greatest show in the history of television. (Yes, I did watch every television program ever produced in preparation for writing this article. And if praise for "The Simpsons" makes you sneer in condescension, it's dollars to Homer's doughnuts you've never watched an entire episode.) No other show can match the way "The Simpsons" has combined consistency of quality with an inventiveness and willingness to take chances over the years. (*Please* don't write me letters about "Twin Peaks" or "The X-Files." I'd like to see those shows come up with just one good Halloween episode, let alone six in a row and still counting.)

I could document the supremacy of "The Simpsons" in all sorts of ways, but let me focus on the greatest challenge the show has surmounted: the creation of the cartoon-within-the-cartoon. As an English professor, I am constantly showing my students Shakespeare's brilliance in handling the play-within-the-play, from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to *The Tempest*. How does one set off a play within a work that is already a play? Shakespeare's answer in *Hamlet* is to elevate the diction and start using rhyme when he wants the drama his hero calls the "Mousetrap" to stand out from the surrounding blank verse. With similar brilliance the creators of "The Simpsons" have for years been giving us two cartoons for the price of one. Unique among all TV shows, "The Simpsons" contains its own *Doppelgänger*, an eerily similar and yet profoundly different cartoon show called "Itchy and Scratchy."

As the story of a never-ending war between a mouse and a cat, "Itchy and Scratchy" grows out of a venerable cartoon tradition. If you took, say, all the subtle character development and Sophoclean irony out of a "Roadrunner" cartoon, you would have an episode of "Itchy and Scratchy." That is its genius: if you are going to distinguish a cartoon within a cartoon, you must raise its cartoonicity to a higher power. In "Itchy and Scratchy," anything that is not pure cartoon has been ruthlessly stripped away to leave us facing the meaningless and gratuitous violence that is the quintessence of cartoon. That is why the Simpson children, Bart and Lisa, can sit day after day transfixed by the spectacle of "Itchy and Scratchy" episodes, from "The Last Traction Hero" to "Remembrance of Things Slashed." In a typical moment, Itchy the mouse fiendishly conceals from Scratchy the *S* in a sign that reads, "We Spay Your Cat—$25." The results cannot be described in a family magazine, but suffice it to say that the future prospects of the Scratchy dynasty are soon looking dim indeed.

Episodes of "Itchy and Scratchy" are placed strategically throughout episodes of "The Simpsons" to give a complex layering to the texture of reality in the show. The total flatness of the cat-and-mouse world gives a rounded quality to the world of the

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Simpson family, and the humans no longer seem quite so cartoonish. But the producers of "The Simpsons" do not allow the mindlessly formulaic "Itchy and Scratchy" to fall into a rut. Rather, they ring changes on the game of cat-and-mouse with a knack for variation that Bach himself would have envied.

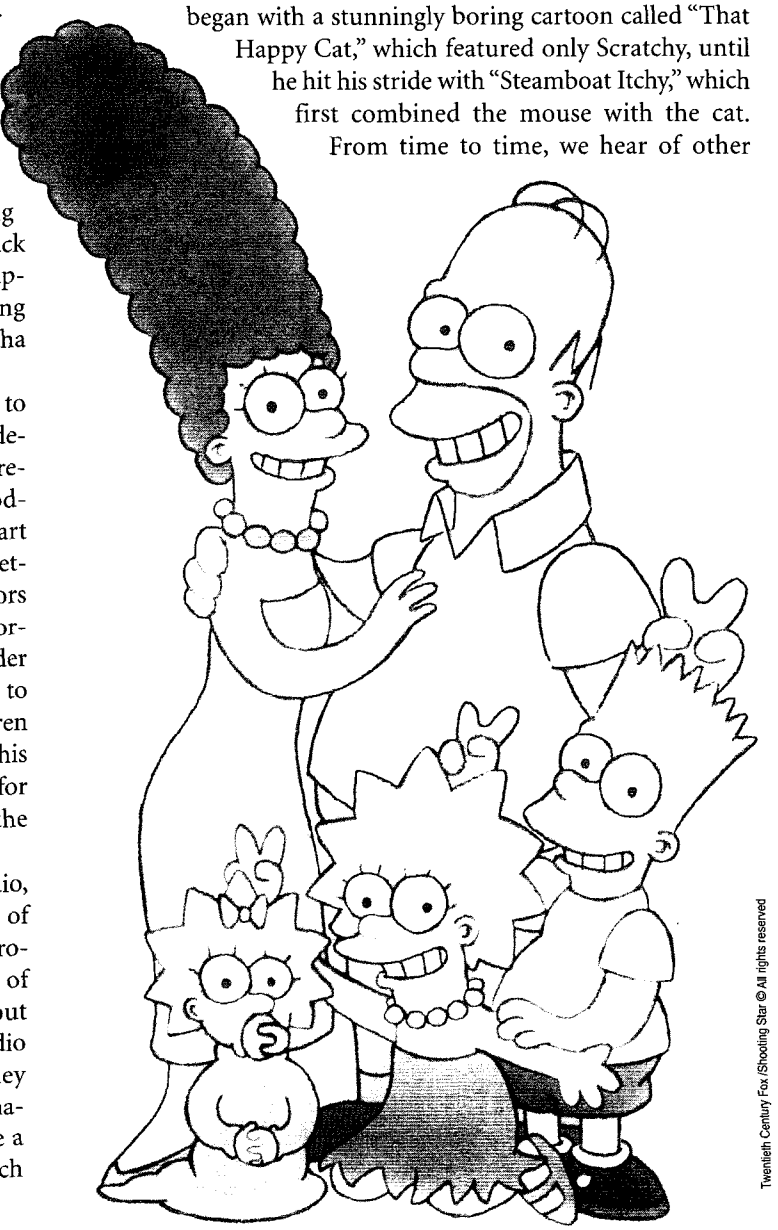
We are living in the golden age of the television cartoon.

In one episode, for example, we get to see the mirror image of "Itchy and Scratchy" in the Communist world. Normally in "The Simpsons," "Itchy and Scratchy" is shown on "The Krusty the Klown Show," a children's television program whose host is a cross between Bozo and Soupy Sales, with a good deal of Jackie Mason thrown in (indeed, Mason voices Krusty's long-estranged father in one particularly poignant episode, but that is another story). Faced with new and stiff competition from a rival kiddie show, Krusty momentarily loses the rights to "Itchy and Scratchy" and is forced to substitute a cheap replacement cartoon from Eastern Europe. Though drawn in the style of the Russian modernist painter Kazimir Malevitch, this cartoon bears an uncanny resemblance to "Itchy and Scratchy." The show thus has a little fun with the Communist predilection for stealing products from the decadent world of capitalism and transforming them into Marxist propaganda (the "Itchy and Scratchy" rip-off is named "Worker and Parasite"). Reflecting the bleak world of Communist Europe, the cartoon is in black and white. (An even bleaker view of the Communist world appears in "The Simpsons" when, in my personal favorite among the episodes, an exchange student from Albania named Hoxha comes to Springfield, but that too is another story).

At some point, the producers of "The Simpsons" began to realize the potential of "Itchy and Scratchy" and decided to devote whole episodes to the cartoon industry, thus giving the creators a chance to indulge in the arch, self-reflexive postmodernism that is the hallmark of their style. In one episode, Bart and Lisa decide they can write "Itchy and Scratchy" scripts better than those churned out by the show's professional authors ("Cartoons have writers?" a wide-eyed Bart asks at first). In order to be taken seriously, the children submit their scripts under the name of their grandfather, Abraham Simpson. This leads to complications when Grandpa Simpson rather than the children receives payment for the highly successful scripts. Bart asks his grandad, "Didn't you wonder why you were getting checks for doing absolutely nothing?" Abe replies, "I figured 'cause the Democrats were in power again."

When Bart and Lisa visit the "Itchy and Scratchy" studio, the episode subtly mocks the Harvard connection of many of the people responsible for "The Simpsons," from erstwhile producer Conan O'Brien on down. We even hear the strains of "Fair Harvard" briefly, as well as some nasty remarks about Yalies. Yet when one of the writers tries to intimidate the studio head with his Ivy League pedigree: "But, sir, at Harvard they taught us—" his boss angrily interrupts, "You should have majored in not getting fired!" In general, you don't have to be a Harvard graduate to follow "The Simpsons" (a fact for which Fox is no doubt eternally grateful), but some acquaintance with the Crimson Tide of Massachusetts certainly helps. For example, the curator of the Springfield Museum, Hollis Hurlbut, is named after two freshman dorms at Harvard.

If one watches enough episodes of "The Simpsons," it is even possible to construct a history of "Itchy and Scratchy"—"75 years of rib-tickling brutality and hilarious atrocities." The cartoon was created in 1928 by a Walt Disney-like figure named Roger Meyers, Sr. (variously spelled Meyers or Myers in different episodes in one of those developments maddening to historians). For those who like revisionist history, one "Simpsons" episode strongly suggests that Meyers stole the "Itchy and Scratchy" concept from one Chester J. Lampwick, who thus deserves credit as "the father of cartoon violence." But in the official history, Meyers began with a stunningly boring cartoon called "That Happy Cat," which featured only Scratchy, until he hit his stride with "Steamboat Itchy," which first combined the mouse with the cat. From time to time, we hear of other



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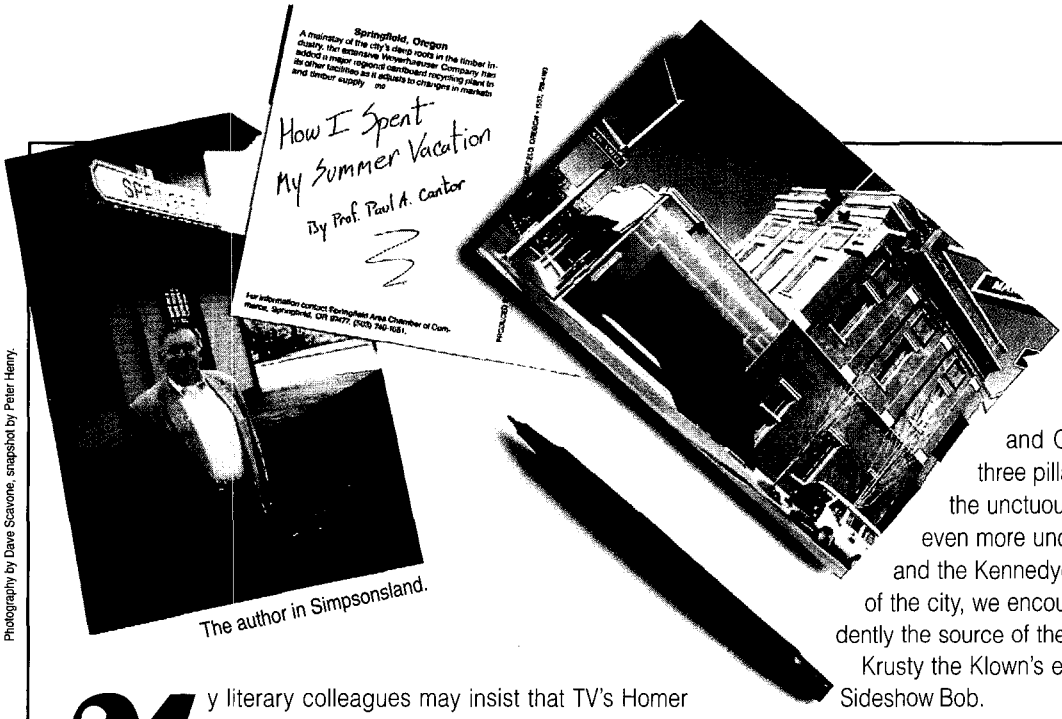
characters, such as Disgruntled Goat, Ku Klux Klam, or Flatulent Fox, but for some reason they never caught on.

Controversy surrounds the middle years of "Itchy and Scratchy." Meyers appears to have done patriotic service during World War II with anti-Hitler cartoons, but a cloud hangs over his 1938 production "Nazi Supermen Are Our Superiors," about which the less said the better, and Lisa speaks of the tastelessness of the "Itchy and Sambo" cartoons of the late '30s. The peak of Meyers' creativity was undoubtedly *Scratchtasia*, an excerpt of which looks an awful lot like the "Sorcerer's Apprentice" sequence in Disney's *Fantasia*.

Continuing in the footsteps of Disney, the Meyers family eventually founded Itchy and Scratchy Land, billed as "the violentest place on earth." Divided into Torture Land, Explosion Land, Searing Gas Pain Land, and the ever-popular Unnecessary Surgery Land, this state-of-the-art theme park has something for everyone, including a "world-class chemical dependency center" for Mom and Dad. Unfortunately, Euro Itchy and



Photography by Dave Scavone, snapshot by Peter Henry.

The author in Simpsonsland.

My literary colleagues may insist that TV's Homer Simpson has his origins in Nathanael West's novel *The Day of the Locust*, which does indeed contain a character with that name, but I have always suspected that a show as profoundly true to reality as "The Simpsons" must have its roots in the real world. Then, just as I was writing my "Simpsons" article for TAE, I fortuitously received an invitation to visit a former student now completing his master's at the University of Oregon, Eugene. A budding poet, Peter Henry is also a keen semiotician of popular culture and so knew that "Simpsons" creator Matt Groening hails from Oregon and has divided his time among Eugene, Portland, and, most suggestively, a town called Springfield.

My scout Henry first took me to the famous statue of *The Pioneer* on the University of Oregon campus, which is clearly the model for the statue of city-founder Jebediah Springfield well known to "Simpsons" viewers. The landscape of Eugene is dominated by Skinner Butte, named for the city's founder, Eugene Skinner, and in turn the source for the name of the principal of Bart Simpson's elementary school. (Principal Skinner might be disturbed to learn that Skinner Butte is the town's Lover's Lane.)

An expedition to Portland unveiled further proof of Groening's uncanny ability to transfigure the everyday urban landscape of Oregon into cartoon magic. In fact, a street map of Portland reads like a guide to the *dramatis personae* of "The Simpsons." Driving down just one avenue in the semi-fashionable Nob Hill section of Portland, we crossed Lovejoy Street, Flanders Street, and Quimby Street, signs pointing to three pillars of the "Simpsons" community: the unctuous minister, Reverend Lovejoy, his even more unctuous parishioner Ned Flanders, and the Kennedyesque Mayor Quimby. Driving out of the city, we encountered Terwilliger Boulevard, evidently the source of the last name of Bart's nemesis and Krusty the Klown's erstwhile second-banana, the evil Sideshow Bob.

But it was our visit to Springfield, Oregon, itself that truly confirmed the way "The Simpsons" grows out of reality. Springfield is a blue-collar, industrial town that is dominated, admittedly not by a nuclear power plant, but by a lumber mill that seems to present just as much of an environmental hazard. Like the television Springfield, the Oregon town has a little museum (housed in an abandoned Oregon Power Company substation!), which featured an exhibition of "Bridal Costumes of the Pacific Northwest" when we visited. Walking the streets of Springfield, we came upon one bar after another that might be the prototype of Moe's Tavern. Most tellingly, the very topography of Springfield, Oregon, suggests its television counterpart. The town is backed by rolling hills that call to mind a number of scenes immortalized in "The Simpsons," while its proximity to Eugene evokes the Springfield/Shelbyville rivalry of the TV series.

As I prepared to leave, I began to wonder whether I was making too much of all these putative "Simpsons" parallels. Then the last thing I heard as I boarded my plane was a page for someone named Brockman. If I hadn't been in such a hurry to get to my seat, would I have been vouchsafed a glimpse of the original of news anchorman Kent Brockman, a fixture of prime-time television in the Springfield of "The Simpsons"? I'll never know, and frankly I didn't give the matter much thought on the flight home—what with all the unintelligible clamor from the Albanian exchange students on the plane.

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Scratchy Land failed to prosper, judging by the plaintive cry, "My child needs wine," uttered by a virtually unemployed French ticket-taker. A more successful effort of the Meyers family was *The Itchy and Scratchy Movie* (with novelization by Norman Mailer). Enjoying an eight-month run in Springfield theaters and garnering nine Academy Awards (despite having only 53 percent new footage), this movie is, in Lisa Simpson's words, "the defining event" of her generation.

A recent episode of "The Simpsons" reveals how "Itchy and Scratchy" has dealt with the problem every successful TV program eventually confronts: aging. Producing episode after episode, you find yourself threatened with running out of new subject matter. But like Yeats in his poem "The Circus Animals' Desertion," the creators of "The Simpsons" find a theme precisely in their very running out of themes. The episode begins with a crisis in the cartoon industry—ratings for "Itchy and Scratchy" have plummeted. To rejuvenate the cartoon, a new character is added. Discussing this over dinner, the Simpsons find it ludicrous, even as they are joined at the table for no apparent reason by a new character named Roy, a hip-hop version of Fonzie from "Happy Days."

In this episode, "The Simpsons" faced its ultimate challenge: to come up with a debased version of "Itchy and Scratchy," somehow to make the show even more mindless, crass, and vulgar. The only possible solution was to fold Homer Simpson himself into "Itchy and Scratchy" in a strange Möbius-strip convolution of the cartoon universe. Homer is chosen by the Itchy and Scratchy empire to be the voice of a third character, an obnoxious "dog with an attitude" named Poochie. "We're talking the original dog from Hell," proclaims one studio executive. "You mean Cerberus?" asks one of the egghead Harvard writers, only to be fired on the spot.

Complete with focus-group research and buzzwords like "proactive," this episode is a hilarious send-up of the way aging television shows desperately try to prolong their lives by latching on to new trends, in this case the rap music and plugs for recycling that Poochie mouths.

Though Poochie is unceremoniously killed off when he fails to raise ratings, "The Simpsons" lives on, as does "Itchy and Scratchy." Confronted with what one of the Harvard writers earlier described as the original "dramaturgical dyad" of cat and mouse, Bart proclaims with satisfaction, "Back to the basics: classic "Itchy and Scratchy." Lisa eloquently brings the episode to a close: "We should thank our lucky stars they're still putting out a program of this caliber after so many years."

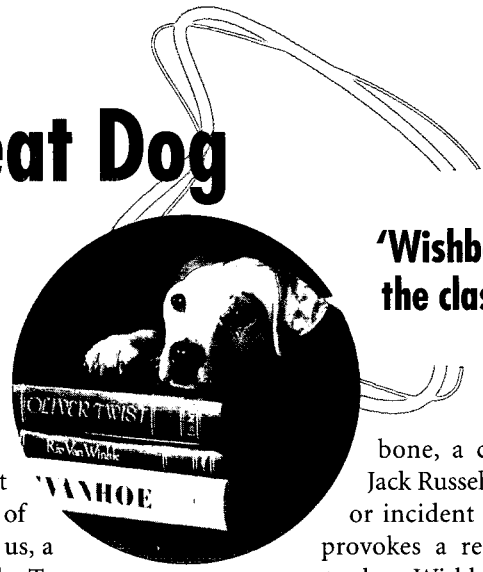
I couldn't have said it better myself.

Paul A. Cantor, professor of English at UVA and author of Shakespeare's Rome *and other studies, will soon deliver a paper on America's favorite nuclear family at a Hampden-Sydney symposium on social policy.*

Great Books, Great Dog

'Wishbone' brings the classics to life

By Frederick Turner



I am standing on the battlefield of Shrewsbury advising a dog how an English medieval king might comport himself in battle. Before us, a company of archers has just loosed a volley of arrows; behind us, a squad of mounted knights in full armor, glittering in the Texas sun, prepare to charge the forces of Douglas the Scot and Harry Percy of Northumberland.

This odd scene is no fantasy. Admittedly, I am stretching things a little to say that I am coaching a dog; actually, I am talking with Larry Brantley, the talented young actor who is the voice of Wishbone, the nation's favorite TV dog. We are filming the "Wishbone" version of Shakespeare's *Henry IV, Part 1*, and Rick Duffield, the director, is rehearsing the armies of England and Scotland—numbering about 60 in all—for their electronically multiplied encounter. I am the literary adviser for the syndicated children's TV series that stars Wishbone, a cheery, pizza-eating, bookish Jack Russell terrier. Each week some crisis or incident occurring in his TV "family" provokes a reminiscence of some literary event, where Wishbone casts himself as the hero of one of the great works of literature.

Those who expose the faults of TV are performing a valuable service for our society. But examples of fine workmanship and the principled and imaginative use of the medium also need to be pointed out and celebrated. When my ex-graduate student Melanie Munnell, a story editor for the show, asked me to help out, I hesitated, having heard horrifying things about the hype, ego, and ethical wasteland of TV. But Melanie could not, I thought, be involved with anything unworthy. Then I met Rick and Maryellen Duffield and was convinced: the show is a model of how to produce good television.

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Rick Duffield's *Official Wishbone Handbook,* the in-house manual for the show, begins with a remarkable series of quotations. It opens with Marcus Aurelius—"Your mind will be like its habitual thoughts, for the soul becomes dyed with the color of its thoughts"—and notes that "'Wishbone's' mind is colored by the world of books and stories." The handbook goes on to cite Samuel Butler on dogs: "The greatest pleasure of a dog is that you may make a fool of yourself with him, and not only will he not scold you, but he will make a fool of himself, too." Finally comes *Nop's Trials,* Donald McCaig's book on working dogs: "Every human child must learn the universe fresh. Every stockdog pup carries the universe within him. Humans have externalized their wisdom—stored it in museums, libraries, the expertise of the learned. Dog wisdom is inside the blood and bones."

The intellectual seriousness of these quotations is counterpointed on the set by a kind of deadpan, half-suppressed exhilaration at the sheer absurdity of getting the audience to believe in Wishbone as Sherlock Holmes, Don Quixote, the Count of Monte Cristo, Anansi, Ali Baba, or Prince Hal. Soccer, the terrier who plays the central character (he has several understudies), is the consummate professional: courteous but distant with lesser beings like the literary advisor, a model of concentration on camera, able to relax offstage and relieve himself quietly against a tree. To see Rick Duffield in action as a director is awesome for a literary fellow: somehow ideas and feelings are resolved into action, movement, the very placement of the characters.

The talking animal is an enduring feature of human stories, a staple of fairy tales and mythology. It is our symbol of the great mystery of our nature: at some point in our evolution we must have realized that *this* animal had begun to speak and was no longer simply an animal. The realization must have been terrifying and exalting and humiliating all at once. We feel an ineradicable shame at our own nature—we blush by instinctive reflex, conceal our nakedness, laugh with embarrassment when our digestive system makes a public announcement.

I think I came to realize some of these things when I read George Plimpton's snippy review of "Wishbone" in *TV Guide:* "The main problem, of course, is the anthropomorphic use of poor Wishbone. He's plunked down with his smart-alecky accent into the worlds of these great classics, surrounded by human actors. There he is with a tufted Greek helmet, facing down the swaggering suitors towering over him in *The Odyssey.* It's not too much to imagine him playing Sancho Panza to a human-size Don Quixote, but it is another thing to accept him as Shakespeare's Romeo, dolled up in medieval pantaloons, standing beneath the balcony and listening to Juliet intone, 'Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo?'"

Yet every human child feels himself at first to be an animal, barely able to control himself, a small, clumsy creature among gigantic yet graceful adults, awkward and inarticulate, and nevertheless expected to play the role of a human being. Wishbone's comic inadequacy expresses something very profound about our nature, especially our way of slowly becoming adults. As I put it in a never-published rejoinder to Plimpton's review, perhaps adulthood is when one is no longer moved and delighted by talking animals, by Babar, by Mole and Rat in *The Wind in the Willows,* by Wilbur and Charlotte in *Charlotte's Web.* But thousands of children love Wishbone because he is one of them: an inquisitive child.

Wishbone's comic inadequacy expresses something profound about our nature.

Plimpton may also miss what some adults seem to love about "Wishbone": the strange, fresh transformation the show performs on these ancient core stories of our heritage, and the way that the series makes them so oddly relevant to our ordinary middle-class American experience. Our cultural vitality comes out of our children's continual re-encounter with the tradition. Wishbone embodies all the fine absurdity and the imaginative liberation of that encounter.

When shooting started this spring, Rick asked me to compose a few words about "Wishbone" for the cast and crew. What resulted was a sonnet that attempts to catch the show's "take" on the strange riddle of human existence: When Larry Brantley speaks Wishbone's lines, he is a man playing a dog who is miming the lines in response to a human animal trainer, pretending to play the central human part in another fictional reality created by a dead literary genius.

And behind this conundrum is the even stranger mystery of how humans came to be humans and dogs came to be dogs. For the histories of humans and dogs have been intertwined perhaps since the last ice age. We huddled together in the cold times and learned to hunt together; humans learned pack values of loyalty and honor from the dogs, and they learned their almost-human intelligence and communicative brilliance from us. Dogs are in most mythologies central to the story of how we changed from unreflecting animal to troubled, soul-burdened, world-shaping human being. When Wishbone imagines himself the hero of a human book, some kind of strange circuit is complete.

The reader may not have been expecting a meditation on human moral evolution in an essay inspired by TV. But this is exactly what TV should do, though indeed it does it very rarely. I believe that children can learn a great deal about virtue from Wishbone, and in a delightfully unpreachy way. Besides the obvious implications about decency, family, honesty, self-control, love, and so on that can be gleaned from the framing story of Wishbone's contemporary family, there are deeper lessons that our culture needs to hear:

- **We become good by acting as if we were good.** St. Paul tells sinners to "put ye on Christ," and the verb he uses is the word for putting on a costume. Part of becoming what he calls a "new man" is going through the motions, performing the role of goodness. This "moral" is an important corrective to our American habit of judging by inner intentions rather than by actions.

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Wishbone as Robin Hood

- **Our basic instincts are good in themselves but incomplete.** They need to be trained and disciplined by good habits. In the heat of the moment we are not really free to do anything other than what our impulses prompt us to do. But over time we can deliberately train and ingrain habits and customs, which can radically change what those impulses will be—from timidity to courage, from selfishness to generosity, from political lying to bold truth. This is our true freedom. Wishbone thus corrects the TV talk-show morality in which it is tyrannous to disapprove of any sincere impulse, even if it is selfish and perverse.
- **Fantasy can be noble; imagination is not necessarily at war with moral goodness.** This contradicts the tendency of some of our self-proclaimed guardians of morality to condemn all art and imaginative play.
- **We can learn to interpret stories.** Interpretation is not simply in the eye of the beholder, so that we can legitimately extract any message, however corrupt and self-serving, from a narrative. When Wishbone is reminded of the theme of some literary work by an incident in Oakdale life, he teaches his audience how rightly to read both literature and life.
- **Stories are naturally moral.** Any good story has a central figure with whom we can identify, a quest worth achieving, obstacles that must be overcome, and a conclusion satisfying to our basic human sense of rightness, even if it is tragic.
- **The past is relevant to the present, and may even be the vital gateway to a liberating perspective.** Sometimes it is the present—its habits, its fashions—that shackles us and destroys our freedom.
- **Morality and virtue are not parochial "Western" notions: they are the achievement and property of the whole human race.** "Wishbone" finds its great stories all over the world, from many cultures.
- **Courage, cheerfulness, trust, and optimism are virtues.** One does not need to prove one's seriousness and moral probity by paralyzed caution, gloom, cynicism, and pessimism.

"Wishbone" is only a good kids' show; it is not perfect, and I do not want to make inflated claims for it. There are greater works of narrative and dramatic art. But it does some things that only TV can do, it has no influences on kids that are not good ones, and it is fun.

It's not all wasteland out there.

Frederick Turner is Founders Professor of Arts and Humanities at the University of Texas, Dallas.

No Biz Like Show Biz

On the set of a new show, life is good

By Ben Stein

I was lying in bed in the Hilton on Marco Island, Florida, when the call came from Rob Rothman. Flu was besieging my body, and I was drenched in sweat, but my former agent had tracked me down and wanted to talk.

"Some of my clients are doing a pilot at Fox," Rothman said. "There's a part in it for you if you're interested. It's small but I think it's just right for you. And if you like it and they like you, something might come of it."

When I dragged myself back to Los Angeles, the lovely Pearl, my personal manager, asked me to read the script—it was

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a very funny show named "Manhattan Man"—and to come in for an audition.

"I'll read it," I said. "But I think they wrote it for me, so I don't really want to have to audition. I don't see why I have to audition for parts anyway. I can do any part except jumping out of an airplane." Sure enough, a few days later I was told there was no need to audition: "Just show up and do it."

The producer, Jonathan Axelrod, I had met years before. The director was Jamie Widdoes, whom I had worked with on "Charles in Charge." Writer David Stern grew up in suburban Maryland, where I'm from, and had also written for the late, lamented "Wonder Years," in which I had a recurring role. In short, it would be like family.

The show's template was sit-com perfection: a family with deep conflict between the generations over the family business—which just happened to be the superhero biz, with capes, utility belts, and the whole nine yards. The casting was great: Ken Howard as the father; Carlene Watkins as the wife; Ben Bode as the reluctant superhero son; and the hilarious Ken Campbell as the plump son, jealous of his brother's powers, who wants to be a superhero too but can do no more than "slightly warm" the villains with his busted-toaster-like x-ray vision. I was to play a psychiatrist.

Unfortunately, how one scene led to another was not always clear. Motivation was expressed subtly if at all. A prodigious effort would be required to clarify the dramatic parts and still make sure the show was broadly funny. But since the first law on sit-com sets is that actors never say a bad word about the script, it would be hard for little me to tell the writer about the need for changes.

The second law on sit-com sets is to be relentlessly upbeat. We all were. Carlene Watkins kissed me as if she knew me. Ken Howard, the White Shadow himself, treated me as an equal—which I am not in any measure but age. Ben Bode, the star, was as down to earth as a star can be. And Ken Campbell, a fellow "voice talent," was about as pretentious as a donut salesman.

Being on a set is like joining a summer camp musical production. It's that relaxed—at least for the actors. As you drive to work through Beverly Hills and Century City and see commuters in suits heading mournfully for the office, you have to feel thrilled that at 52 years of age, you're heading for a summer camp comedy skit, which amazingly turns out to be professional quality. If you are a writer like me, you are truly grateful. Any time you step outside your tiny dressing room, there are people to talk to, interesting machines to study, tables of food to eat. You are at an all-day party. You can sleep through part of it and then go down and join in.

On day five, a miracle took place. I'd like to think it started with my mentioning some motivation issues to David Stern. More likely, some folks from Fox also noticed a few lacunae, or—even more likely—the very smart writer Stern noticed he needed to do a little patching and plastering. In any event, before long, Stern became leader of a circle of writers who honed the script. Matt Carlson, mein old kamerad from "The Wonder Years," Frank Martin, a young "Simpsons" guy, a certain mysterious Mr. Tatham from "Canada" and "The Simpsons," my pals Tom and Max from "Seinfeld," and still other writers pitched in and pulled all-nighters. Next thing I knew, the script was a jewel.

After an infusion of hard writers' work, we knew why Ben Bode was rebelling against his father. We knew why Ken Howard had doubts about his ability to carry on as superhero without his son. We knew that both sons were carrying on family traditions whatever they did, superhuman or simply human. We knew quirks that explained why each character was bound to behave as he did. And we laughed at all of them.

We knew, for example, that man's-man hearty Ken Howard might have had a few issues about his own masculinity, which made us like him much more than if he really were a man of steel inside and out. After the struggles, we had what my old boss Norman Lear said you needed in a sit-com: a family you like so much you want to invite them into your home every week.

We entered that glorious state sometimes found in TV: you are having fun, living the life of a big kid, getting decently paid, and you're part of a friendly, exclusive group. If things break right, you might be in that group for a few years. As a child I never got to play enough, and now I spend most of my life playing. I am always tired, and now I get paid to sleep most of the day. I love company, and I get to have plenty of it. Twelve years ago, when I started this acting thing, rarely could I find anyone on the set to have a conversation with. Now, with the huge influx of more Eastern, better-educated types, there are simpatico conversationalists everywhere. The rest of the world may be undergoing cultural breakdown, but in TV-land people are smarter than ever. All these pleasures are mine, while my peers from law school are reading cases in solitary cell-like offices. Oh thank you, God.

In the last two days, the writers, producers, studio people, and director were still perfecting things—preparing to perform before a live audience, which was made up mostly of Marines and sailors (they loved the show). Then, the moment of truth. We performed before a lively, appreciative audience. We did and we did it again, and I was in heaven. Then it was over. About midnight, I was released from the set and gathered my belongings from the dressing room. I hate being released. It means the party's over. It means I may not talk to some of these people for years. I hoped they would call me back and say they needed to do my scenes again. For me, the end of work on a show is like getting back into my pumpkin and returning to scrubbing floors at Morton's.

I still had the flu, but it didn't matter. When you've worked in a good show, you're beyond sickness and health.

Maybe there will be other shows. Maybe it will never end. Why not? What rational reason is there for the show to end, when for me there was never a rational reason for it to begin?

Will "Manhattan Man" be on the schedule? That's up to powers above me. No matter what happens, it's already in permanent reruns in my head.

Ben Stein is an actor, lawyer, and writer in Los Angeles. "Manhattan Man" is not on the fall schedule (but there's always hope). His game show, "Win Ben Stein's Money," began airing on Comedy Central in July.

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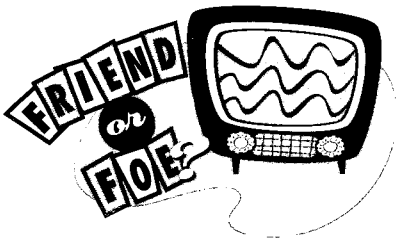

The Fox News Gamble

A brash news channel bets non-liberal reporting will beat the competition.

By John Meroney

Brit Hume has his work cut out for him. As head of the Washington bureau of the infant Fox News Channel, he's working hard to get the scoop on the top stories in town. With competition in the round-the-clock TV news business from Bill Gates (MSNBC) and Ted Turner (CNN), Hume is clearly waging an uphill battle.

In calmer days Hume was the White House correspondent for ABC News, a post he held until last December when he left to work for media magnate Rupert Murdoch's upstart 24-hour cable news station. Going from a major network to an unproven cable venture might not sound like a wise career move, even if one is offered a reported $1.3 million to leave a job that already paid an estimated $800,000. "The money Fox offered was good, but the money wasn't the reason," says Hume. "I think ABC would have matched the money—that's their history—but they didn't have anything that was close to this in terms of an offer that was of interest to me. No network does."

What persuaded Hume to leave ABC, where he had worked since 1973, was the chance to get in on the ground floor of a company primarily devoted to the news business. For him, the name of Murdoch's media empire, News Corporation, says it all. "This is a news company that has important entertainment properties. Under Disney management, ABC is an entertainment company with some news properties. I think in the end, over the long period of time, that will make the difference," says Hume.

Murdoch certainly seems to have demonstrated his long-term commitment to creating a presence in TV news. When he unveiled plans for FNC, he said he would be willing to pay cable operators $10 per subscriber to get the venture moving. He's already spent more than $100 million since the FNC launch last October, having built a state-of-the-art, 110,000-square-foot studio in New York's Rockefeller Center and a Washington bureau with a panoramic view of the Capitol.

What appears on screen is equally ambitious. Live ten-minute newscasts run every half-hour, augmented by interview and analysis segments about the day's headlines. FNC also has business, interview, and debate programs, all presented in an innovative, graphic-intense format. And even though the Fox News department is less than a year old, it has already beaten its competition by being first with stories about the Peruvian hostage release, the Hebron peace agreement, military sex scandals, and the O. J. Simpson custody decision.

But is anybody watching? Audiences for cable news programming have always been low. For example, of the 71 million homes reached by Ted Turner's CNN, only 274,000 have regular

Left, Roger Ailes, chairman and CEO of the Fox News Channel, confers with Rupert Murdoch, who heads Fox's parent company, News Corp.

John Meroney is a writer in Washington.

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viewers. MSNBC, the year-old joint venture between Microsoft and NBC News, is available in 37 million homes, but only attracts audiences in 24,000. Then there's FNC: Even after Time Warner agreed to carry it on its cable systems in late July, making it available in New York City, the nation's number one TV market, FNC will still only reach an estimated 30 million subscribers. Before the deal with Time-Warner, FNC was averaging viewers in a mere 10,000 homes. Despite these numbers, Murdoch predicts FNC will eventually double CNN's audience.

Ailes requires FNC reporters to watch footage of the tormented mother of Richard Jewell.

Meanwhile, Murdoch and his lieutenants are trying to figure out how to convince viewers to turn to them as a credible source for news when his company is best known for prime-time fare like "Melrose Place" and "Beverly Hills 90210." Signing familiar TV news names and faces like Hume, Catherine Crier, Mike Schneider, Bill O'Reilly, and Neil Cavuto helps. But what FNC executives are banking on is their pledge to be fair and balanced in their reporting. "Our theme is, let's be sure the viewers have as many hard facts as they can get on the subject, as much context to the story as possible, and a balancing point of view so that people can make their own judgments," FNC Chairman and CEO Roger Ailes told me.

Not a bad idea when so many Americans believe the news media are biased. Journalists have long rebuffed the charge, but a few like Hume admit the problem is real. "Reporters aren't activists seeking to consciously advance an agenda, but if you don't guard against it, politics creeps in in insidious ways that you're not aware of," he says. "If you approach a story with the attitude, 'I have some political views, and I've got to screen these out,' you've got a very good chance of doing that. But if you say, 'I'm not in this to grind a political ax; I'm just going to react to it the way it hits me,' you run the risk of doing what I'm afraid Washington reporters do all the time, which is allowing their political attitudes to affect their judgment of events." Ailes, who made a name for himself as a conservative media strategist with clients that included Nixon, Reagan, and Bush, also believes that even though media bias is a reality, reporters can purge it from their stories: "If you don't have some bias you're probably brain dead, and I don't want to sit next to you at dinner because you're a moron. But are you so arrogant that you feel you have to go into the newsroom and shove your personal point of view down the public's throat?"

Kim Schiller Hume, who joined FNC as Washington deputy bureau chief several months before her husband, Brit, says ideological orthodoxy often prevents stories from being reported fairly on TV. "There isn't room for any opinion other than conventional news media thinking," Hume says. She witnessed this during her 14-year career at ABC News, where she was a producer for "World News Tonight" and "This Week with David Brinkley." Never was it more evident than after the 1994 elections. Hume says it was "like turning a cruise ship" to get her colleagues to accept the fact that the GOP had become a majority party. "Ted Kennedy would be having a rogue hearing to protest something that would be going on in the real Labor Committee, and we would run to cover it as if Kennedy were still writing legislation. It was a knee-jerk reaction," she remembers.

Although some still debate the existence of media bias, most observers from the left and right concede that reporters are often guilty of juicing up stories to make them more compelling. Brit Hume himself has participated in this venerated approach to making headlines, but now repudiates it. He cut his teeth in the early '70s with journalism legend Jack Anderson, who is infamous for pushing a story to its limits. "You work for Anderson as I did and you learn the art of saying the most the facts will support. It goes on all the time, but you have to be wary of it when you're trying to be fair," says Hume. "You've got to find another way to be interesting rather than getting out the old hypodermic needle, which most Washington reporters know how to use. Here at Fox, we're trying to be careful about that." So careful that Ailes requires FNC reporters to watch footage of the tormented mother of Richard Jewell, the security guard wrongly accused of bombing the Atlanta Olympics, so they can empathize with her plight.

But some industry insiders believe that the Fox campaign for fairness and balance is merely a savvy marketing tool. "It capitalizes on a kind of undercurrent of conviction in the American public that the other broadcast networks are liberal and CNN is growing liberal," says Ed Turner, a long-time news producer and now a CNN executive. "Some people believe the media are liberal commie bomb-throwers out to do in the Republic. Dividing up the small news-viewer pie is tough, and when you're just starting out, any kind of gimmick helps. Promoting it as a fair and balanced source for news is a great technique, particularly if you have any fears of being considered biased," he says.

Indeed, it's tempting to suspect that Fox will put a *rightward* spin on the news, since FNC is headed by Murdoch and Ailes, both conservatives, and also features well-known conservative editorial writers like columnist Tony Snow, Fred Barnes (*The Weekly Standard*), Eric Breindel (the *New York Post*), and David Asman (the *Wall Street Journal*) as hosts and analysts. Brit Hume himself has written for *National Review*, *The American Spectator*, and *The Weekly Standard*. And Rush Limbaugh even advertises FNC on his radio program. "Check any recent polls and it's clear Americans think the media are biased," booms Limbaugh. "But there's now an alternative. Fox News is fair news," he says. Ailes, who also produced Limbaugh's short-lived syndicated TV show, says the Limbaugh ads were purchased because "Rush is one of the great salesmen of commercial products on the air."

Part of the speculation that Fox may lean to the right comes not just from some of its on-air personalities but from its programs. "If you start out doing a show asking whether there really is a black church arson epidemic, and the President of the United States says there is, then you could sort of say the show itself is tilted toward the right," says Breindel, who moderates "Fox News Watch," a weekend show that spotlights stories ignored by the dominant media. But Breindel is careful that the liberal point of view is represented by panelists like Jeff Cohen and Laura Flanders of Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting, a media watchdog group that criticizes the press from a left-of-center perspective.

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Even though FNC appears to showcase conservative personalities more than other news outlets, Hume believes FNC will be faithful to its pledge not to skew reporting. "We've made a hugely conspicuous commitment to being fair. If we're not, it's going to be obvious. We can't say we're being balanced and then tilt the news one way and think nobody will notice. We're really out on a limb," says Hume. And so far, the reviews indicate he may be right. "I don't see the sort of outright bias that some critics feared with a station headed by Ailes," says Howard Kurtz, media critic for the *Washington Post*. "My sense is their news coverage is pretty straightforward."

One factor likely to prevent Fox from leaning right is its producers and writers—the real power behind generating story ideas and inviting guests. Fred Barnes equates their influence with newspaper editors who decide what stories appear on the front page and admits they "feed me a lot of questions" which he then asks his guests. The consensus seems to be that FNC production staffers are no different from the liberal types one finds at other stations and networks. Marty Ryan—a long-time NBC producer who is now responsible for "Fox News Sunday," the Fox network show hosted by Tony Snow that has been a prototype for FNC programming—told me that the Fox newsroom is just like every other place he's ever worked. Snow echoed that view: "I suspect if you ran out and took a poll of those in our newsroom, their politics would be more liberal than average."

Fox may well succeed in striking an ideological balance between its production staff, on-air personalities, and executives. Already conservatism seems to be receiving the same degree of credibility and respect that the dominant media have traditionally accorded liberalism. One recent example is an FNC report that featured a supporter of homosexual rights and a Catholic priest reacting to a Hawaiian law that gives homosexual couples the same benefits as married couples. "Instead of getting the kind of person you generally see on newscasts," says Fred Farrar, bureau chief for FNC in Los Angeles, the kind of "rabid right-winger whom you'd really be scared of if he lived next to you because he's probably got a bomb factory in his basement, we found a well-spoken minister who is concerned about the message that law sends. It's certainly a little different dialogue than you'd normally see."

Fox also seems inclined to take a more critical look at stories involving politically correct causes. Take the FNC story about Earth Day in April, which revealed there were more journalists than supporters at one particular event. "Most news organizations covered only the microphone. We backed the camera up and showed there were just a few people and more reporters trying to flog Earth Day into something it wasn't. Had 10,000 people showed up, we'd have reported it. But the fact is, there wasn't great fervor for Earth Day," says Ailes.

Fox is also taking on stories other outlets avoid. FNC was the only source for live, gavel-to-gavel coverage of the early weeks of the Senate campaign finance hearings, breaking only for news updates and commercials. "We didn't think it was as dull as everybody else did," says Hume. Viewers agreed: FNC saw some of their highest numbers to date, with as many as half-a-million households tuned in at various times.

Whether Murdoch's commitment to a new approach to news coverage will win him enough viewers to eclipse MSNBC and CNN will not be clear for some time. Perhaps the day will even come when ABC, CBS, and NBC abandon the news business altogether in favor of entertainment programming. Whatever happens, Murdoch is already a partial victor just by getting into the game. Some industry insiders view the cable news race in terms similar to the situation that faced the networks during the 1940s and '50s. Once the three major networks staked out places on the TV dial, there wasn't much room for others to join. Even today, viewers still tend to watch channels 2-13, regardless of whether they have a dial or digital TV set.

Veteran news producer Steve Friedman believes there's something to be said for just taking up space. "When digital and computer technology take over, Murdoch will already have the shelf space that others won't. Being on channel 54, 61, or 72 won't be an adverse problem in the new world of technology," Friedman says.

For now, most agree that Murdoch is serving an important need with FNC. Walter Cronkite, dean of TV news and someone who has traditionally bristled at the suggestion of bias in TV reporting, now appears to concede this point. He thinks a news organization able to capitalize on TV's perceived imbalance will succeed. "From what I hear out there among the populace, there is a very strong feeling that TV news is biased," Cronkite says. He suggests that doubts about the media's ability to report a story fairly are largely the product of the Nixon administration's crusade against the press. "That, I think, began this era of cynicism about our free press." Still, "I'm not suggesting that there aren't some reasons within the press itself to inspire that cynicism. There are indeed."

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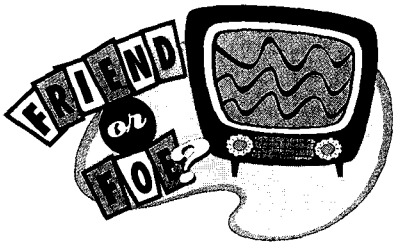


The Trouble with Network News

By Don Feder

Conservatives complain incessantly about liberal bias in television news, but while well-founded, this criticism misses a larger point: Network news today is frivolous, fluffy, sensational, tabloid, dumbed-down, and just plain stupid. If *People* merged with the *National Enquirer,* the result would be network news. The medium has a built-in bias against objectivity, calm reflection, and historical consciousness, and in favor of sloppy sentimentality, victimology, and convenient blame location—that is to say, in favor of liberalism and against conservatism.

The increasing lack of substance in nightly newscasts, their growing predilection for razzmatazz over reality, has drawn the notice of the medium's venerable elders. Walter Cronkite charges: "The networks now do news as entertainment," while Robert MacNeil (formerly a chatting cranium at PBS) complains, "All the trends in television journalism are towards the sensational, the hype, the hyperactive."

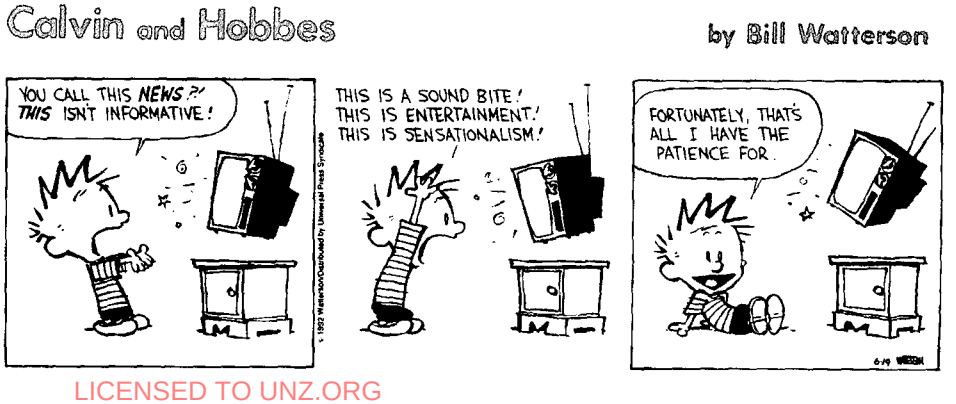
Marvin Kalb, formerly of CBS and now at Harvard, explains that although the evening news once told viewers what they should know to stay informed on world events, "now they're telling you what they think you want to know about." What they think you want to know about—what will pull you in to boost their ratings—is celebrity gossip, scandal, disasters and threats, conspiracies and the paranormal, and health and lifestyle features (billed as "news you can use").

There is a fascination, verging on obsession, with anything health-related: Alzheimer's, antihistamines, arthritis, brain injuries, clot busters, diabetes, estrogen, fibroids (uterine tumors), grapes (to reduce the risks of cancer), memory loss, osteoporosis and the like. And this in the first quarter of 1997 alone.

Network news is lousy with features on the meaning of dreams and daydreams, how to find quality day care, rescue services for pets, exposés of Internet sex, the fantasies of UFO cultists, fear of flying, and how telephone psychics rip you off. The tide of fluff and helpful stuff (which qualifies as news only in the remotest sense of the term) is still advancing. In a media variation on Gresham's Law, flab drives out hard news. According to the watchdog *Tyndall Report,* in the past decade, real news coverage declined by at least 7 to 8 percent. But the trend is long term. In the mid-1960s, network news shows regularly had 20 real news items. Today, half a dozen is closer to the norm.

Take the top evening news stories of 1996. ABC devoted almost as much time to the TWA Flight 800 crash as to the Dole campaign. CBS was more interested in the O.J. Simpson civil trial than the Whitewater investigations. NBC rated the Atlanta Olympics above the Middle East peace process, the war in the Balkans, and the GOP's San Diego convention (in fact, Olympic coverage almost beat out the other three combined). In short, these days it's "The CBS Evening Entertainment and News Snippets with Dan Rather."

In his book *The Inarticulate Society,* Tom Shachtman examined the declining quality of oral communication. In one chapter, Shachtman recounted the contribution of television news to this deterioration. He looked at the quality of language on "The CBS Evening News" from 1963 to 1993. The first broadcast he examined was on August 29, 1963, the maiden voyage of



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TED KOPPEL DISCUSSES TV'S INFLUENCE ON THE PUBLIC

There is not a great deal of room on television for complexity. Opinions of weight tend to sink with barely a trace in television's ocean of banalities. We are nothing as an industry if not attuned to the appetites and limitations of our audience. We have learned, for example, that your attention span is brief. We should know—we helped make it that way. Look at MTV or "Good Morning America" and watch the images and ideas flash past in a blur. This is a direct reflection of the television industry's confidence in your ability to concentrate.

You can partake of our daily banquet without drawing on any intellectual resources, without either physical or moral discipline. We require nothing of you, only that you watch, or say that you were watching if Mr. Nielsen's representative should happen to call. And gradually, it must be said, we are beginning to make our mark on the American people.

—Ted Koppel hosts ABC's "Nightline." This is excerpted from an address he delivered at Duke University.

CBS's half-hour format. There were few visuals. Cronkite read the news from a script, and journalists filed their reports. The vocabulary appealed to the reasonably educated. Shachtman: "The sentences have dependent clauses and often run to 18-25 words. Each sentence contains such conceptual and abstract words as 'unanimous,' 'reduction,' 'underdeveloped,' and 'colonial,' and such phrases as 'using the Sino-Soviet ideological dispute as a cover.' Absolutely no pictures accompany these reports." In addition, "the television reporters' sentences are full, sometimes near to bursting from the effort of condensing information. Their sentences are also complete, have dependent clauses, and are highly grammatical; they are often longer than can be uttered with a single breath."

Thirty years later, Shachtman found that correspondents and those interviewed (especially politicians and government officials) are driven to produce quotable sound bites, having learned that this is often the only way to get attention. This, as much as anything, has reduced campaigns to slogans and public-policy debates to dueling clichés. Vocabulary is now at a seventh-grade level. Sentences are 12 to 15 words. (Shachtman comments that correspondents will soon be "talking in headlines.") "The language of the broadcast is tending toward complete union with the few thousand words that we utter in our everyday conversation.... Whereas the first Cronkite news of 1963 was clearly based on full literacy, this 1993 broadcast exists in theoretical limbo, between the written language and the spoken language." This vocabulary signals the surrender of seriousness. News of politics, government, the economy, and foreign affairs requires language an articulate adult would use. But when journalism becomes tabloidism, a seventh-grade vocabulary will suffice.

That the networks are retreating from hard news is probably for the best, given the institutional biases against objectivity, sound analysis, historical consciousness, and in-depth reporting. Network news is great at dramatizing the plight of victims (welfare mothers, illegal immigrants, the homeless), but seemingly incapable of showing the other side—the impact on our culture of illegality, irresponsibility, and fragmentation.

Emotions are what TV news does best—the tenant who tearfully doubts he'll be able to afford an apartment once rent control ends; the assembly-line worker who doesn't know what he'll do if Washington allows the merger to go through and he's laid off; the woman on welfare who wonders how she'll be able to afford day care and medical insurance on a $7-an-hour job once her benefits end; the agonized civil-rights leader who assures an interviewer that if affirmative action is abolished, inner-city youth will lose their opportunity for higher education and a ticket out of the ghetto; the widow of a crime victim who's just sure that if it weren't for "the ready availability of handguns," her husband would still be alive.

Broadcast news thrives on poignancy: the angry charge, the tearful confession, the admission of despair. All can be conveyed in a matter of seconds, with facial expressions (the picture worth a 1,000 words), and crisp but evocative commentary supplementing the sound bites. Where network news fails is at conveying any sense of how a situation developed. Why is there a shortage of affordable housing? How does a 27-year-old end up alone with a junior-high education and five kids? How have government policies and judicial decisions conspired to create a burgeoning predator population?

One side of these stories transfers easily to film; the other does not. For people who believe that national problems need to be solved through reason rather than emotion, that presents a big problem.

Don Feder is a nationally syndicated columnist and author of Who's Afraid of the Religious Right?

THE TV NEWS STRANGLEHOLD

Americans can become informed about the state of their society by tapping into any of hundreds of sources of rich, varied news and analysis. They can read their local papers, or the *Wall Street Journal*, or national editions of the *Washington Post* or *Washington Times*. They can draw economic, political, and cultural information from *Time* and *Newsweek*, or the *American Spectator* and *National Review*, or the *Nation* and the *New Republic*. They can listen to Rush Limbaugh or one of the other radio talk-show hosts who spend hours every day analyzing public affairs. They can listen to National Public Radio, watch "The 700 Club," or surf the Internet.

So the average American absorbs a broad stream of news and information, right? Wrong. The average U.S. citizen does not read, listen to, or watch *any* of the things I've listed above.

A study by the University of Michigan finds that 50 percent of *voters* pay no attention whatever to newspaper articles about politics. Fully 77 percent read no magazine articles. While audiences for radio and on-line services have increased, they still only represent narrow slices of the population, 19 percent and 10 percent respectively, according to a survey just released by the Pew Research Center.

Where on earth, then, do Americans get their news and information? Just one place: Television. For a whopping 72 percent of the public—that's 192 million people—TV is now their primary source of news.

—L. Brent Bozell is president of the Media Research Center in Alexandria, Virginia.

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The Virtues of C-SPAN

By Harvey Mansfield

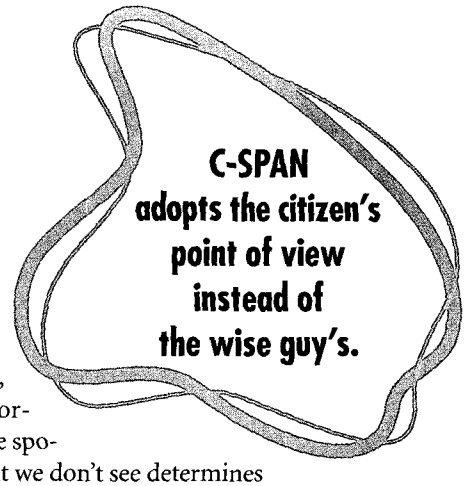
With a healthy, unexciting breakfast, you need a zesty appetizer to start the day. I receive mine from C-SPAN, where the morning talk show, "Washington Journal," gets my partisan juices flowing. A liberal and a conservative politician pick articles from the morning paper and usually get into an argument. They spin, they bicker, they exchange barbs. I love it.

C-SPAN, two educational channels funded by the cable television industry, is known for providing "unfiltered" news—including live coverage of floor debates in the U.S. House and Senate, unabridged taping of campaign stump speeches, and similar political jousting. Yet the same network famous for providing the most partisan news is also considered the most objective. Why? Because C-SPAN lets politics appear as it is, with all its partisan slants. Sometimes the slant is obvious, as when a Democrat or Republican states his party's position, and sometimes it is concealed behind the desire to appear "nonpolitical" (or "bipartisan"). C-SPAN tolerates both: It doesn't dismiss people's opinions merely because they are partisan, and it doesn't dismiss the aspiration to rise above partisanship merely because the effort often fails or is insincere.

Brian Lamb, the head moderator, and his able assistants do something almost never done on the major networks. They listen and they question; or rather, they listen *so that* they can question. Lamb's purpose is to enable the talker to make his point, not to embarrass him. But to do that, he asks for evidence, for a source, for an example, for consistency, or—when it's a wanderer—for the point. Sometimes the result is to embarrass an ill-informed caller or a biased guest, but that is not the intent. The intent—though Lamb doesn't boast of it—is to educate.

On C-SPAN talk-show programs the moderators do not simply sit by silently while others talk; they maintain an active neutrality that helps all sides. They want to improve our respect for democratic debate; so they do their best to make the debate worthy of respect. You never hear a voice-over or a sound-bite on C-SPAN. In a voice-over, the network reporter gives the gist of a speaker's statement in his own words, and then often illustrates his interpretation with a punchy phrase actually taken from the speaker. The emphasis is the reporter's, and the speaker, who may well be the President of the United States, becomes a character in the reporter's story—and thus a witness to the reporter's moral or intellectual superiority.

The ruling vice of American journalists is not that too many are Democrats but that they show such disrespect for democracy. Their error is mostly unconscious but nonetheless grave: They despise the surface of things and look too much, too quickly, for the inside story. The surface of things in democratic politics is the partisan dispute of the moment, but journalists allow themselves to get bored with that. They don't listen partly because they have heard it before and mostly because they are convinced beforehand that it doesn't mean anything. The only important events, they believe, are the ones that go on behind the scenes, and the only important words are those spoken in private: What we don't see determines what we do see, and the job of the journalist is to unearth secrets, not to report what is obvious.



C-SPAN, by contrast, is not afraid of the obvious. It adopts the citizen's point of view instead of the wise guy's. The citizen according to C-SPAN is part voter, part tourist. As a voter, a citizen needs to know what is necessary to form sensible opinions, which means he needs to hear issues and principles as well as tactics and intrigue. Scandals are displayed of course, but for what they show about accuser and accused, not for general, Zeitgeist, hot-air commentary.

With frequent shots of Washington, D.C., C-SPAN appeals to the naïve tourist who both wants to learn and is favorably inclined toward the sights he visits. And C-SPAN has two school buses, actually mobile transmitters, that travel throughout the country, stopping at historical sites, museums, local newspapers, and exploring congressional districts. Viewers get to see the things Americans are proud of—their history and above all their government.

Most of the day the two C-SPAN channels broadcast proceedings of the House and Senate, with explanations but without cynical comment. C-SPAN also covers ceremonies, and stays for the whole event, with no apologies for the boring parts, which actually give spectators and viewers time to wonder and reflect. The network is there for political meetings of all kinds and tendencies, and after the session is over, the camera lingers for a minute so that we sense the difference between formal and informal, and are reminded that life is larger than TV.

C-SPAN is not mainly intellectual or entertaining, though it is both. It is deeply practical as it helps us examine the business of our common life. Its founder, Brian Lamb, is a suitably modest man who understands our democracy and has set an example of how to use the media democratically. C-SPAN airs many complaints about the media and receives a few of its own. Since more callers are conservative, for instance, the latter sometimes want to know why liberals get equal time. But if the rest of TV news were more like C-SPAN, complaints would be fewer and less justified.

Harvey Mansfield is Kenan Professor of Government at Harvard University and author of many acclaimed books on politics.

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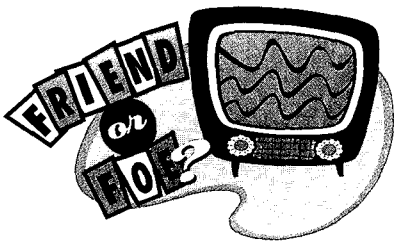
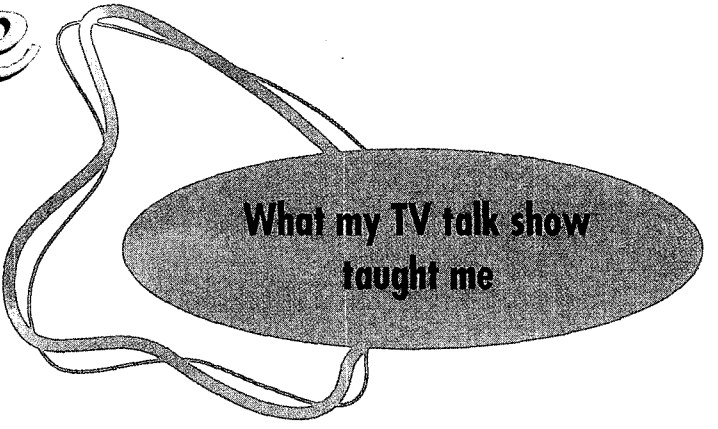


TV and Me



By Dennis Prager

During 1994-95, my national television show was on 156 stations, covering over 80 percent of America. Yet of all the people to have their own television show, I must be the most ironic choice. First, I almost never watch television. Since elementary school, with the exception of animal shows and some sports, I may have watched 20 hours a year. Second, I have continually urged people to decrease the hours they devote to watching TV.

But since on any given day, about 100 million Americans will be found in front of their TV sets, and since my primary goal in life is to bring my ideas, which I call "ethical monotheism," to as many people as possible, how could I turn down the opportunity to have a national TV show when Robert Turner, the head of Multimedia, uttered magic words to me: "I want to do something good on television." The more I learned about him—including that he subscribed to my journal, *Ultimate Issues*—the more allayed were any fears I would be asked to be different from who I really am.

As I quickly realized, however, the question was not whether I would want to do television. It was whether I could do anything good on television and be successful. It is extremely difficult to do anything constructive, let alone profound, on daily commercial television. I say this with sadness. But three factors militate powerfully against serious programs:

- The medium is inherently superficial. Television appeals almost entirely to the most superficial of our receptors, the eye.
- Programming is solely determined by the bottom line, which is in turn determined only by ratings.
- Too few serious people watch television, especially talk shows.

Everything negative I thought about television has, unfortunately, been reconfirmed by working in it. Perhaps nothing summarizes the state of American TV and the challenge of doing something worthwhile on it more than this: Of the over 100 shows I recorded, one was visually titillating. For about six minutes of one show, models from Frederick's of Hollywood modeled scanty lingerie. That show, both times it aired, received the highest ratings of all my shows.

As it happens, the show's topic was a good and serious one: Should a woman wear sexy lingerie for her husband? My guests were a woman psychologist and a woman executive from Frederick's. Both were very intelligent—the Frederick's executive sits on the board of a major orchestra—and the dialogue was on a high level. But the intelligent discussion was not why so many people watched the show; the scantily clad women were.

As long as advertising revenue determines what appears on commercial television and as long as advertisers care only about ratings, television will be a medium largely for titillating nonsense. The reason is simple: Between the eye and the ear—our two primary senses for receiving information—the eye is far more superficial.

The Hebrew Bible was profoundly aware of the eye's superficiality. "Do not go astray following your heart and your eyes," it warned, because they "cause you to prostitute yourselves." This is why graven images were forbidden in the Ten Commandments. The Bible trusts only the ear: "Hear, oh Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord alone."

That is why radio is far more capable of supporting sustained thought. The ear can be satisfied by thought, but the eye cannot be. Thoughts do not intrigue the eye.

Virtually every term I learned for making successful TV involves something to titillate the eye. Three terms come to mind: "more action," "eye candy," "good TV." As anyone in TV can tell you, it is not enough to be interesting, and certainly not enough to be profound. On TV, you must move around, be "more animated," as I was probably told 200 times. And my producers were right. When I watched my own show, I found myself more interesting when I was physically more animated—moving my arms, getting up from my seat, making facial expressions.

Dennis Prager is a talk-show host on KABC Radio in Los Angeles and author of Think A Second Time, *from which this article is adapted.*

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Just as the palate reacts positively to candy and lusts for more of it, the eye, too, lusts for more tasty input. This is known in television as "eye candy." It is vital to keeping viewers lusting for more of your show. A beautiful woman is the most obvious form of eye candy. That is why even television news almost always features a good-looking woman. And though not as important, TV also features good-looking men as eye candy.

Obviously, none of this matters on radio. While an overweight Rush Limbaugh can be popular on TV, it is solely a result of his prior popularity on radio. If he had first tried to succeed on television, producers would have laughed at the idea of featuring an overweight man talking.

Further proof of the importance of "eye candy" is that many viewers remember how one looks. An author told me that after a national book publicity tour, he found that people who had heard him on radio talked to him about what he said, while people who saw him on television talked to him about how he looked. I received as many comments on how I looked on my TV show as about what I said on it—and I talked about important things! Even people who really did listen to what I said on television commented on my choice of ties. (This is not a criticism of these people—I do it, too.) And during "sweeps"—the periods when TV ratings are measured—the amount of female skin shown increases dramatically, even on newscasts!

The aim of television shows is to have as much "good TV" as possible. "Good TV" should not, however, be mistaken for anything analogous to "good book" or "good music" or even "good movie." "Good TV" means either sex or fireworks. On talk TV, "fireworks" refers to people arguing with, preferably shouting at, each other. On other TV shows, it refers to violence. TV has so much sex and violence because they are the easiest, surest ways to produce "good TV."

New York Times columnist A.M. Rosenthal has noted how important it is to CNN, which is widely considered serious television, to have people who hold positions as far as possible from each other on its talk shows. Ideally, the most liberal liberal and the most conservative conservative should confront each other. People who hold a nuanced position, or who sometimes hold a liberal and sometimes a conservative view, or worst of all, find ambiguity in some issue, do not make for "good TV."

"Good TV" is one reason TV has so contributed to the coarsening of debate in America. Coarse people with coarse arguments are "good TV." "Good TV" is also one reason sound bites get shorter and shorter each year. Focusing on one inflammatory sentence, even if wrenched out of context or irrelevant to the rest of a speech, is "good TV."

My lingerie show's high rating also taught me that many people do not actually watch TV shows. Rather, they scan the channels with their remote control, searching for the sexiest or most violent scene or the most heated argument or the wildest behavior. The remote control has probably contributed as much to the low state of TV as the primacy of ratings. Nothing else explains the uniquely high ratings of my lingerie episode.

That, however, was precisely my producers' argument. "Dennis," they said with sincerity and good will, "we need some sexy shows to draw people to your show. Get them hooked, and then you can do the type of show that you really want to do." They offered a second powerful argument for compromise: "Dennis, if we don't get good ratings early, you won't have a show later on to do all the good things you want to do on television."

Dear reader, what would you do? If your aim was to do something elevating and worthwhile on TV—thereby possibly touching millions of lives—would you do some shows with sexy eye candy, if that could mean the difference between having or not having a show?

This was my painful dilemma, exacerbated by additional factors. First, my entire ability to influence people rests on my having moral credibility. How much could I compromise—in front of a national audience, no less—before that credibility began to erode? Second, how could I look into the eye of a reader of my books or a subscriber to my journal after I seemed to offer a TV talk show in conflict with my own standards? On the other hand, how can I ever reach those who know nothing of my work if I don't compromise for some good early ratings? What good are ideas that are never encountered?

Those questions went through my mind, and not only regarding sexual titillation. My producers felt that a fair percentage of my early shows had to be on eye-catching subjects—meaning subjects that I couldn't care less about. For example, would I allow a world championship pool player to hit a billiard ball out of my mouth? I did. Would I do a show on women bodybuilders? I did, although I focused on a question that annoyed my body-

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builder guests: Aren't immense biceps on women a sign of the gender confusion of our time?

In return, I was able to do the shows that I cared about, shows that are not seen on commercial television. I did entire shows on:

- The validity of the existence of God.
- How parents can raise good children.
- New Year's resolutions about being a better human being, not just losing weight or stopping smoking.
- Whether the Holocaust is the only true genocide, with one of the world's leading scholars of the Holocaust, Professor Steven Katz.
- Why men should get married.
- Why so many Americans are lonely.

People who argue against ever compromising are zealots who will achieve little good.

Given these high-level subjects, were my compromises worth making?

Before answering, a word about the problem of compromising. Compromising has a bad name. It suggests the relinquishing of one's integrity for selfish gain. But what if one compromises for an ideal, not for selfish gain? Then the issue becomes trickier. If you never compromise, you may never have the opportunity to achieve a much greater good. To cite a major example of this conflict: Were the Allies morally right in allying themselves with the murderous regime of Joseph Stalin to better fight the even more horrific regime of Adolf Hitler? The answer is, *of course.* People who argue against ever compromising are zealots who will achieve little good.

But once you decide to compromise, other tough questions remain: How much compromising can you do before you have sold your soul? If I began getting good ratings based on titillating visuals, could I stop? A fellow Multimedia talk show host, Jerry Springer, lived with this problem daily. He wanted to do something better with his show, but his ratings soared the more he lowered his standards. Then he was stuck. If he raised his standards, he would lose the audience that came to him for the lower type of program.

The other issue with compromising is: Are you fooling yourself into believing that you are compromising for an ideal, when in fact you are compromising for personal gain? After all, TV pays well.

These issues preoccupied me. They explain why I compromised when I did. And they explain why I finally chose not to compromise, but to do a show that reflected my principles. If I ended up with no show, I would know that I failed on my terms.

As it happened, the compromises that I did make were, in the end, pointless. With the exception of the lingerie show, none of the other compromises, like the billiards show (in which, incidentally, I shot three balls into three different pockets with one shot), rated higher than the shows I wanted to do.

By the fourth month of shooting, we had all decided that I would do shows on the subjects that I most cared about and in the way that I was best suited to presenting these subjects—without guests, interacting with a small, intelligent audience of people who both agreed and disagreed with me. And the ratings began to rise slowly but steadily—too slowly, however, for most local stations.

The problem of low television quality lies in part with local stations. At their annual convention, station heads would tell me how much they personally liked my show. "So why do you put it on at two o'clock in the morning?" I would ask. "Well, it kills me, Dennis, but it's the Ricki Lake-type shows that get the high ratings."

I met so many nice people who run TV stations that I was thinking of titling this essay, "When Good People Do Bad Things." For make no mistake about it, TV station managers and the heads of TV production companies are doing some bad things.

I am certain my show would succeed, given time and a decent time-slot. Enough people would enjoy an entertaining half-hour of television that made them think. But such a show needs time. KABC Radio gave me years to earn my audience for what I call "thought radio." TV permits no such chance. Stations give a show a few months, sometimes a year, to garner good ratings. All these considerations should make proponents of the market economy—people like me—acknowledge that a market economy comes with serious moral challenges.

If advertisers sponsored programs based on their quality, or at least if they didn't sponsor garbage, ratings would cease to be the only decisive concern. Today, however, so many advertisers sponsor any given show that no one company is associated with the bad ones. When company names were associated with shows, the shows' quality was high. Recall "GE Theater," "Texaco Star Theater," "Colgate Comedy Hour," "Kraft Television Theater," and "Hallmark Hall of Fame." Can you imagine "Ford Motor Presents Jenny Jones"?

Despite all of TV's problems, I also learned that a show that reaches more than a million people can make quite a positive impact. Permit me just a few examples.

A bus driver in San Francisco told me that he was looking into his responsibilities as a man because of my show on masculinity. I received a letter from a young woman in Lincoln, Nebraska, telling me that, as a result of watching my TV show, she and her husband had decided to study Judaism and were in the process of converting to it. Many Christians thanked me for producing a Christmas show that actually honored Christmas as a meaningful religious holiday. They added that they were particularly moved that it was a committed Jew who had made the show. One small step in helping Christian-Jewish relations.

Thinking about all the good that television can do and how much more bad than good it does is quite angering. But whatever happens with my TV career, I will always be grateful to Multimedia Entertainment for giving me the chance to have a national television show.

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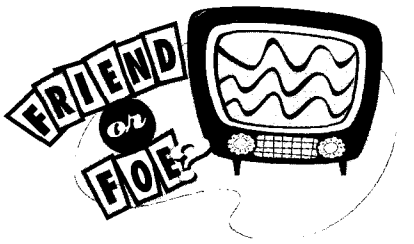

Feelings, Nothing More Than...

How TV sentimentalizes life & trivalizes politics

By Mark Steyn

> **"Television can make you feel, but it can't make you think"**
>
> *—a network news correspondent who prefers to remain anonymous*

Four years ago, the fledgling QVC home shopping network came within a whisker of taking over Paramount. Think of it: A channel that peddles sock-mops and nasal depilators to housebound losers somehow got big enough to bid for one of the most glittering names in entertainment. Incidentally, if you don't know what a sock-mop is, it's an ingenious device you wear on your feet that enables you to clean the kitchen floor without bending down and, therefore, without averting your eyes from the TV screen, where you might miss something important—like an infomercial for a nasal depilator.

With the advent of the sock-mop, television has finally found its footing—and maybe its Achilles' heel, too. Today, TV is just something that's there, flickering away in the background—reflecting back the dead-eyed stare of the bored clerk at the all-night gas station; or just above your head at the departure gate; or tastefully concealed in an authentic antique-style armoire in your favorite executive hotel suite—though the card on top, inviting you to pay just $6.95 for the Adult Video Channel's exclusive screening of "Reform School Sluts on the Lam," does tend to give the game away. I hasten to add that my regular TV reception at home in New Hampshire is so fuzzy and indistinct that, when I'm in hotels, the scrambled, blurry porno channel seems more than explicit enough. But in a way that's as revealing as the sock-mop: in an age when cable systems offer as many as 500 channels, the only way a station can draw attention to itself is through bad reception. Instead of the "global village" foreseen by that old '60s fraud Marshall McLuhan, the world that beckons now is more like a global housing project, an electronic Cabrini Green in which we're all barricaded into our customized ghettoes. While you're glued to the Rehab Network, I'm hooked up to the Denial Network, or the Transgendered Persons' Dating Channel, or the Hors d'Oeuvres Channel, or the Wainscoting Channel, or, more likely, the "Mary Tyler Moore" reruns on "Nick at Nite."

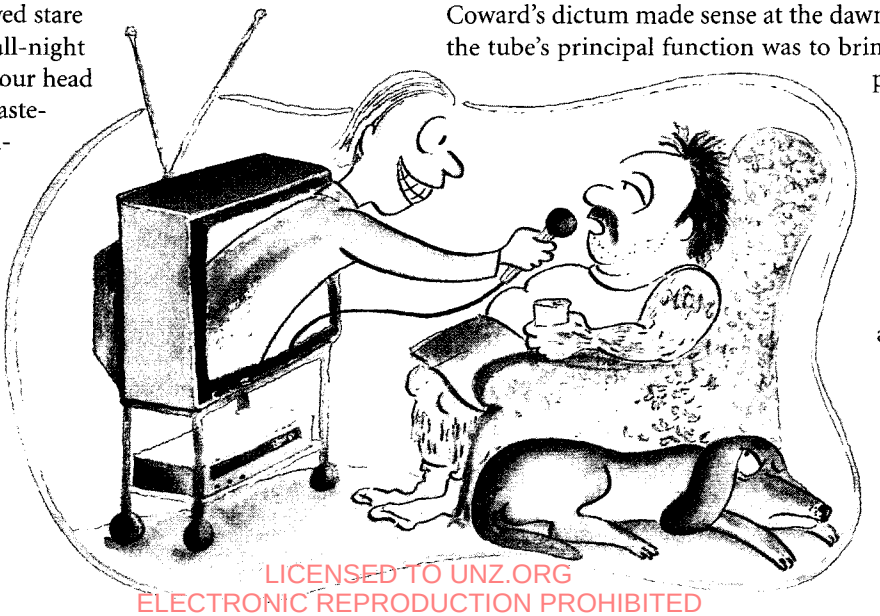

Illustration by Leila Cabib

Television," Noel Coward declared loftily, "is for being on, not looking at." Not anymore. No matter how degrading it is to look at "Sally Jesse" or "Ricki" or "Rolonda," it's nothing compared to how degrading it is to be on it—to put yourself up as one of those "Transsexuals Who Date Their Wives' Fathers" in the hope of your 15 minutes of TV fame. Coward's dictum made sense at the dawn of the TV age, when the tube's principal function was to bring extraordinary people into your living room: "The Bob Hope Show! With Special Guest Ella Fitzgerald!!" But not today, when, in a grotesque travesty of democratization, anyone can get on, and most of those who want to are drearier than your dreariest neighbors. Total view-

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ing hours are stalled: More channels don't mean we watch more TV, just that the pie is ever more thinly sliced.

And that's not surprising. When it comes to "shows"—sit-coms, dramas, programs in which people act, sing, dance, wear revolving bow-ties and juggle poodles, shows, that is, in which people *do* something—we're barely producing more than in the 1950s. Most of the new networks—CNBC, MSNBC, ZZZZNBC—can't afford to make any proper shows but only to hire hosts who sit around on modular furniture at the back of a converted warehouse in New Jersey *commenting*. Sadly, there are now so many of us commenting that there's hardly anyone left to do anything for the rest of us to comment on. Talk-show hosts are already reduced to interviewing other talk-show hosts: On CBS, David Letterman regularly interviews his direct competitor Ted Koppel. At the present rate, sometime in the next century everyone will have his own talk show.

To borrow a metaphor from the self-help shelves, news is from Mars, TV is from Venus.

In other words, America, the first broadcast society, is becoming the first post-broadcast society—the first narrowcast society. Thus, Hollywood moviemakers endlessly raid the vaults of '60s and '70s TV—"The Flintstones," "The Brady Bunch," "Sgt. Bilko," "The Addams Family"—because these are the last artifacts of a shared popular culture, of a *popular* popular culture. Today, around five million people watch David Letterman's "Late Show" on CBS, which is to say 264 million of their fellow citizens don't. In Britain, by contrast, the BBC's "Pride and Prejudice" attracted audiences of ten million in a country with a fifth of America's population. Yet Jane Austen is seen as "elitist," while Letterman is seen as "populist." Clearly, that's not an economic judgment, only the fiercely held pride and prejudices of the American TV industry.

The decline of mass television is revealing how little TV has changed the cultural landscape. To be sure, on the strength of "Dynasty," an opportunist editor signed Joan Collins to crank out a couple of potboilers, but otherwise novels, good or bad, are much as they were; same with the theater. As for McLuhan and his "global village," that was the biggest delusion of all. Today, television has the technology to bring you live reports from the other side of the world—but for some reason it never does. To the dwindling number of viewers of the network news shows, the rest of the world is farther away than it was a century ago. The London bureau of CBS is now responsible for covering not just the British Isles but also Europe, Africa, and the Indian subcontinent.

But don't worry; it's not too onerous a load. Britain gets a look-in when a royal's caught toe-sucking, but for most other countries it takes a presidential visit or the deployment of U.S. troops to command American news cameras. The Soviet Union devoted vast resources to preventing its citizens from hearing news from other countries: they seized foreign papers, they jammed transmitters, they smashed printing presses. The Americans have succeeded beyond the KGB's wildest dreams just by leaving it to ABC, CBS, and NBC.

So what, in the end, *has* television changed? Only the entire vernacular of public debate. You could pick a zillion examples, but take the government "shutdown" of December 1995. For days, the national media struggled to report the story: What did it mean? What was going on? Pictures of federal offices with nothing happening in them don't make "good television"—as well as being, in the experience of millions of Americans, indistinguishable from normal service at a federal agency.

And then, a week later, ABC finally found a way into the story. "The shutdown now has a human face," reported Jack Smith on "World News Tonight": "Joe Skattleberry and his wife, Lisa, both work for the government. Both have been furloughed. They can't afford a Christmas tree." And suddenly there's a story: heartless Newt denies Mr. and Mrs. Average Joe their Christmas. The crazed Republicans are trimming not only the federal budget, but also Joe and Lisa's tree.

As I choked back the tears, I was seized by a nagging doubt: I don't know the Skattleberrys, but I do know the price of a Christmas tree in my corner of rural New England—five to ten dollars, according to size. Allowing for the fact that everything in the nation's capital costs more, let's figure that in Washington it's 40, 50, or—what the heck—call it 70 bucks. In 1995, the average federal civilian employee's income was over $40,000 per annum (compared to roughly $21,000 for the average American). Joe and Lisa, being a his'n'hers federal couple, would likely have a combined income of over $80,000. Yet tragically, thanks to the Republican Scrooges, after four days' enforced leave, they found themselves without $70 for a Christmas tree, never mind candy canes and a bag of Hershey's Kisses in seasonal wrappers.

Still, if Jack Smith is as moved and distressed by their treelessness as he appeared to be, well, for the cost of sending a camera crew to film them, ABC could have bought the Skattleberrys a small forest. There is, in short, no reason for Joe and Lisa to be on TV at all.

But that's the big picture, and on the small screen the big picture has a hard time squeezing in: you can't see the wood for the supposedly emblematic Christmas tree. "The poet should seize the Particular," said Goethe, "and he should, if there be anything sound in it, thus represent the Universal." That's to say, most of us find it hard to become exercised over generalities, but if you root these great issues in specific individuals and telling details, we can relate to them: it's a principle that drives most movies, plays, novels. As the distinguished Broadway conductor Lehman Engel used to tell his classes in musical comedy construction: "Particularization is an essential funnel to feeling."

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Exactly. The Skattleberrys' Christmas tree is not designed to make us *think* about the government shutdown but to *feel* about it. When Bob Dole, in the presidential debate in San Diego, kept calling for this or that subject to be taken out of politics, he was, as usual, missing the point. These days almost every subject's been taken out of politics and appropriated to the realm of feeling: health, education, the environment, gun control, drug policy.... To borrow a metaphor from the self-help shelves, news is from Mars, TV is from Venus. The 1996 Atlanta Olympics were the first Venusian Olympics, skewed to the female audience. Oh sure, if you happened to be in the stadium at eight o'clock, you might see a beefy Uzbekistani putting the shot. But if you switched on NBC at eight, the shot-putters were nowhere in sight. Instead, there'd be a heartwarming, prerecorded, soft-focus biographical feature, with plenty of orchestral uplift, on a young American woman who'd triumphantly overcome leukemia to qualify for the 400-meter hurdles. Sports fans complained that there were no results, no stats; visiting athletes complained that you'd never know any other countries besides the U.S. were competing.

The more our political parties package themselves for TV, the fewer people vote.

But NBC's Olympics coverage was only the most spectacular subscriber to the priorities of any network news show: no hard facts, no foreigners, but plenty of soft lifestyle features that could just as easily have been recorded months ago. America's TV networks were the original Venusians, to the point where virtually every in-depth investigation—on drunk driving, toxic waste, crime, housing policy, welfare—begins with a woman blinking back tears and saying, "An' then she looked me in the eyes, an' said, 'Mommy, am I going to die?'"

For most people, news is something that crops up in between sit-coms, soap operas, and commercials, and it's not surprising that, over the years, it should have absorbed the same techniques as its colleagues. Increasingly, special reports are underlaid, like any drama, with incidental, emotionally manipulative music. And from time to time, if the story lacks exciting visuals, it's easiest just to borrow from Hollywood directly: a year or two back, an "NBC Nightly News" story on the changing role of the CIA used clips from *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold.* Three days after the Olympic pipe bomb, CBS News was running a montage of images from the disaster concluding with, "To Be Continued..."—as if real life were no different from their moronic daytime soaps.

President Clinton, a man who keeps the Egyptian head of state waiting because he's discussing his favorite pop music on a rock video channel, understands. Whenever he arranges a public bill-signing, he's accompanied by beneficiaries of his legislation, the Skattleberrys of the hour. Partial birth abortion? Here are five women, he says, who are alive today only because of this procedure. Education funding? Here are five kids who'll directly benefit. Expansion of NATO? Here are five soccer moms who'll soon be eligible for membership. The Skattleberry approach is of limited use for most topics. With "reproductive rights," say, all you need to know is one cold, impersonal statistic: Between 25 and 30 percent of all pregnancies in the U.S. now end in abortion. That couldn't make it plainer: abortion is typically not an "agonizing personal decision" but a routine form of contraception. But the distraught aborter agonizing publicly over her agonizing personal decision sits so much better between the soaps and talk shows.

Pop stars, from Sinatra and Streisand down, routinely turn down TV, with no apparent detriment to their careers; in the theater, *Cats* has outgrossed Hollywood's *E.T.* and *Jurassic Park* combined, despite minimal TV advertising and no presence whatsoever on "Oprah" or "Entertainment Tonight." But politics is uniquely craven in its attachment to TV. In the early hours of the 1996 New Hampshire primary I remember a lone placard suddenly appearing on my town common: "Lamar Walked Here!" For months, according to the network news, Lamar Alexander had been walking across New Hampshire in his red plaid shirt. And now, apparently, Lamar had walked here! "Well, if he walked here, he musta done it in the middle of the night," scoffed a neighbor. On balance, it seemed more likely that a man with a "Lamar Walked Here!" sign had walked here—and, on closer inspection, the lack of footprints suggested that even he had driven here, pulled over, and dropped the sign into the snowbank without even getting out of his truck.

But on television it was business as usual: "I want to thank the people of New Hampshire for letting me walk across their state," said Lamar. Actually, he walked across a few hundred yards in the southern tip of the state surrounded by cameras and his entourage. When the news crews had enough sound bites, he got back in the limo and was driven to his next photo-op. It was the perfect TV campaign—and if TV were real life, he'd have won. Instead, Pat Buchanan won, on an advertising budget of $17.99, with a campaign run by his sister and the support of a bunch of shoestring radio stations to whom he made himself endlessly available. Radio, newspapers, telephone calls—almost anything energizes the audience more than television. It's peachy for sit-coms and cop shows, but it's a passive medium. Which is why the more our political parties package themselves for TV, the fewer people vote.

By colluding in TV's sentimentalizing of the great issues, politicians are turning politics into the same kind of furtive fringe activity as the sock-mop infomercial and the porno channel. According to Ed Rollins, the sixth rule of campaign combat is, "If it's not on TV, it barely matters." Wrong. These days, if it's *on TV*, it barely matters.

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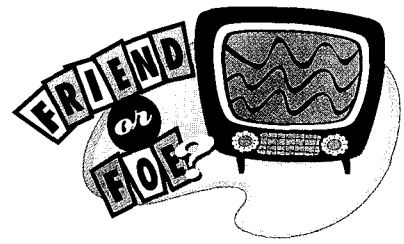

TV Vice?

Sex and violence aren't the problem

By Michael Medved

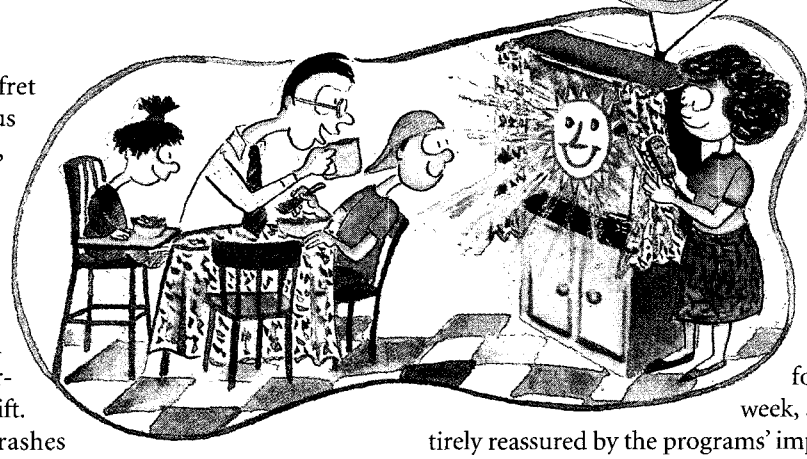

Illustration by Leila Cabib

Most Americans who fret over television focus on its seedy content, often waxing nostalgic for the innocent fare of yesteryear. If only "The Beaver" hadn't transmogrified into "Beavis," they sigh, then TV might still function as a source of harmless diversion and even reassuring uplift.

But this argument crashes head-on into a wall of contradictory history. The generation nourished on such wholesome family fare as "Ozzie and Harriet," "Make Room for Daddy," "The Mickey Mouse Club," "The Real McCoys," "Father Knows Best," and of course, "Leave It to Beaver" did not grow up as well-adjusted, optimistic, family-affirming solid citizens. Instead, children of the '60s went more or less directly from "The Donna Reed Show" to campus riots, psychedelic experimentation, love-ins, long hair, and all-purpose looniness. Could it be that TV itself, rather than the specific content of its programs, erodes American virtues?

The most significant fact about the '60s kids is not that they were the offspring of specific shows like "Howdy Doody" or "Captain Kangaroo" but that they were the first TV generation. The boob tube arrived in most American homes in the '50s, just as baby boomers turned old enough to watch in earnest, which suggests that TV's destructive force lies in the medium, not the message. This insight should force us to reconsider our approach to the battles over television content, the new ratings system, the abandoned family hour, and the rest. If the family-friendly programs of the '50s and '60s led a generation directly to Woodstock, Abbie Hoffman, and the illegitimacy explosion, why try to reproduce those shows' conservative themes today?

Consider a simple thought experiment. Imagine that cultural conservatives manage to install Bill Bennett or Robert Bork as national TV "czar." Henceforth, every show must pass some rigorous virtue test before airing. Sure, TV would thereafter exert a less harmful influence on our children, but would it suddenly become a force for sanity and character-building? If children continued to watch the tube for dozens of hours each week, should their parents be entirely reassured by the programs' improved quality? Or does the sheer quantity of TV viewing represent a deeper, more intractable problem for this society?

These questions are uncomfortable precisely because the answers are so apparent. It is the inescapable essence of television, rather than a few dozen incidentally destructive shows, that undermines the principles most parents strive to pass on to their kids. When consumed in the American pattern of several hours each day, TV inevitably promotes impatience, self-pity, and superficiality.

Impatience

The most recent analyses reveal that the major cable and broadcast networks titillate viewers with a new image every nine seconds on average. This quick editing contributes in an obvious and unmistakable manner to the alarming decline in the American attention span. Andy Warhol's "15 minutes of fame" seems to have shrunk to perhaps 50 seconds.

The effect of TV's rapidly flashing images is most obvious in pre-school classrooms. America's three- and four-year-olds seem less able than ever before to sit still for a teacher—in part because no teacher can reproduce the manic energy or protean transformations of the tube. But those teachers can easily identify the children in class who watch the most TV. Please note that when it comes to this crucial issue of attention span, the admired "Sesame Street" exerts the same worrisome influence

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as the universally reviled "Power Rangers." Even sympathetic studies of "Sesame Street" worry over the way that breathlessly fast-paced show encourages restlessness in its young viewers.

Television promotes impatience in other ways for older audience members. The very structure of televised entertainment—with most shows contained within action-packed half-hours—undercuts habits of deferred gratification and long-term perspective. In the world of TV, every problem can be solved within 30 minutes—or, if it's a particularly formidable and complex, then 60 will suffice. It's hardly surprising that many Americans feel frustrated when their personal projects—in romance, weight loss, or career advancement—fail to produce results as neat and immediate as those they witness on TV.

The commercials that consume so much of each broadcast day also foster the peevishness and unfulfilled desire suffered by many viewers. The purpose of these cunningly crafted messages is to stimulate impatience—to nurture an intense, immediate desire for a hamburger, an electronic toy, a beer, or a luxury car. If advertising does its job effectively, it will leave the mass audience with a perpetual attitude of unquenchable yearning for a never-ending succession of alluring new products.

TV blurs the dividing line between the real and the imaginary.

Self-Pity

The inevitable inability to acquire enough of these products helps to produce self-pity and insecurity, an attitude reinforced by even the most acclaimed and purportedly constructive "public affairs" programming. That programming, like all other "reality-based" television, offers a wildly distorted vision of the contemporary world: TV doesn't broadcast the news; it broadcasts the bad news. A 1996 report in *USA Today* determined that 72 percent of that year's local news shows from around the country led off with stories of violence or disaster, living up to the rule of broadcast journalism, "If it bleeds, it leads."

Contrary to popular belief, this obsession can't be blamed on the blood lust and ratings hunger of unscrupulous news directors. It is a built-in, unavoidable aspect of the medium. If a father comes home after a long day at work and lovingly tucks in each of his five children, asking God's blessing on their slumber, that's not news. But if the same father comes home and goes from bedroom to bedroom shooting each child, it is news.

Television has an especially intense effect because of the medium's affinity for portraying horror and pain. Depicting love or heroism usually requires some sort of background or explanation, and visual media can't easily explain anything. Their strength is immediacy, especially in the impatient, rapid-fire world of contemporary TV. Even if a news broadcast were determined to balance its footage of mutilated bodies and burning buildings with equal time for noble parents and dedicated teachers, which images would make the more visceral impression, or remain longer in the public memory?

The same preference for the dangerous and the bizarre inevitably shows up in "entertainment" television as well, reflecting an age-old tradition. After all, Shakespeare focused on murders and witches and scheming villains and transsexual masquerades, not functional families and upstanding individuals. Nevertheless, the disturbing behavior in novels and plays and even radio shows of the past never enveloped an audience in the way that television does today, when an average American family owns multiple TV sets and keeps them on for hours a day. One pioneering Chicago station, WTTW, based its call letters on its chosen designation as a "Window To The World." For many viewers, that's the function the tube still performs.

The vast number of vivid images that pour through that window enter our consciousness with little distinction between the factual and the fictional. Whether it's the evening news, a sit-com, a daytime talk show, a docu-drama, a cop show, or "60 Minutes," TV blurs the dividing line between the real and the imaginary and shapes our notions of the wider reality and prevailing behaviors that exist beyond our homes. Producers of soap operas report that they regularly receive letters from devoted viewers who address comments to their favorite characters. And literally tens of millions of Americans will instantaneously (and often unconsciously) imitate catchy phrases or gestures from popular TV shows.

This tension between televised "reality" and the actual lives of ordinary Americans prompts self-pity. On the one hand, the impression people take away from regular viewing is that the world is unpredictable, menacing, full of violence, deviance, excitement, and compelling chaos. Decades of research at the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg School of Communication suggest that the principal legacy of TV's emphasis on violence is a "mean world syndrome" in which people become more fearful about the present and future. This helps to answer the question posed in a celebrated *Forbes* cover story: "Why Do We Feel So Bad When We Have It So Good?" Real-life trends have recently been improving in numerous areas, including unemployment, the deficit, crime, air quality, and even teen pregnancy and AIDS affliction. Have you noticed a comparable brightening in the public?

If TV's dangerous world leaves people needlessly frightened and insecure, it also makes them resentful that their personal lives are vastly more "boring" than what they see on the tube. Our national epidemic of whining is aided not only by TV's natural emphasis on bad news, but by the way most citizens remain relatively untouched by these disasters—and so their quiet lives can't live up to the excitement, drama, and sexual adventure that television advances as a new American entitlement.

Superficiality

In television, there is only the thrill of the moment, with no sense of the past and scant concern for the future. Venal programmers hardly deserve blame for this tendency; it's a given in

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a medium that by its nature emphasizes immediacy and visceral visual impact. Flashbacks in a TV drama, no matter how artfully constructed, can never compete with the power of a live broadcast, no matter how insipid. How else can one explain the embarrassing fact that millions of Americans interrupted their lives to watch long-distance shots of a certain white Bronco lumbering down an L.A. freeway?

The O. J. idiocy illustrates another aspect of TV's superficiality: the all-consuming concern with physical appearance. Those who believe our fascination with Simpson's murder case stems from his sports-star status miss the point: Does anyone honestly suppose that the trials would have generated equal interest if O. J. and his murdered wife had resembled, say, Mike Tyson and Janet Reno? The preoccupation with glamour and good looks is nowhere more painfully apparent than in TV news, where the overwhelming majority of these supposedly brilliant and dedicated professional journalists just coincidentally happen to be exceptionally attractive physical specimens.

In real life, we rightly associate "air heads" with an abiding obsession with looks and grooming, but TV doth make air heads of us all. Currently, the most popular show in the world is that profound and probing melodrama, "Baywatch." Its appeal can hardly be explained by the vividness of its characterizations; it has everything to do with gorgeous bodies abundantly displayed. TV trains us to feel satisfied with surfaces, to focus our adoration on characters who make the most appealing visual presentation, without examination of their ethics or accomplishments. Given the lifelong television training of most Americans, it's no surprise many voters readily forgive the misdeeds of political leaders who look cute and compassionate when they emote on the tube.

Beyond bad politics, beyond misleading glamour, television emphasizes another form of destructive superficiality: setting fun as the highest human priority. As my friend Dennis Prager points out, fun is fleeting and unearned—a thrill ride at a theme park, an engaging video game, a diverting half-hour sit-com on TV. Happiness, on the other hand, requires considerable effort and commitment, and in most cases proves durable and long-lasting. Fun can never be counted upon to produce happiness, but happiness almost always involves fun. Casual sex, for instance, may (occasionally) provide a few hours of fun, but it will never lead to the long-term happiness that a permanent marriage can provide. Similarly, watching professional sports on TV can be fun, but it hardly compares to the benefits of actually playing on a team yourself.

TV-viewing represents the most empty-headed, superficial sort of fun in an increasingly fun-addicted society. It is meaningless precisely because it demands so little of its viewers—in fact, physiological examination of TV-watchers suggests they are three-quarters asleep.

Sleepers, awake! It is high time we all woke up, especially those families who attempt to honor Jewish and Christian teachings. In each of the areas described above, TV contradicts the fundamentals of faith-based civilization: While TV promotes impatience, restlessness, and a short-term horizon, our religious traditions command a serene, steady spirit and a view toward eternal consequences. Where television encourages self-pity and fear, religious teachings emphasize gratitude and rejoicing in our portion. And while electronic media inspire superficiality and shallowness, believers know to look below the surface at the cause lying beneath the confusing effects. Instead of transient, unearned fun, Judaism and Christianity stress the permanent good of achieving happiness through a full and virtuous life.

The increasingly unmistakable conflict between investing time in television and the religious priorities that most parents hope to pass on to our children brings us to a potentially historic crossroads. The current situation of TV addiction resembles the situation of nicotine addiction 35 years ago. Shortly after the surgeon general reported that cigarettes are a health hazard, the initial impulse from the tobacco industry and the public was to make the "cancer sticks" safer by improving filters or reducing tar and nicotine. Of course, such measures probably succeeded in saving a few lives, but these expedients were hardly a long-term solution.

Today, efforts to reduce televised levels of shock and stupidity resemble those old attempts to reduce tar and nicotine in tobacco. It may be worth doing, but it's hardly the ultimate solution. The most important response to the dangers of cigarettes was a long-term, overall decline in the number of smokers, even though millions of Americans continue to smoke to their own detriment. Similarly, the most significant reply to TV's malign influence will involve exhortations that lead to a long-term, overall decline in the rate of TV-viewing—even though many millions will be free to continue in their television addictions.

This is not a pipe dream. A recent *Wall Street Journal*/NBC News poll found that an astonishing 65 percent of Americans say they are "watching less television altogether" than they were five years ago, despite the explosion of entertainment choices and cable and satellite-dish technologies. Nielsen ratings and other studies confirm the encouraging news that Americans are spending a bit less time with the tube than they did ten years ago.

In fact, today's wide array of televised possibilities has done nothing to inspire public appreciation for TV. When asked whether "TV has changed for the better or for the worse over the past ten years," 59 percent thought it had worsened; only 30 percent said it had improved.

There just may be a receptive audience for a new campaign to reduce TV-viewing—to give back a few years of life to the average American who will currently spend an uninterrupted 13 years (24-hour days, 7-day weeks) of his life in front of the tube. After all, no one would consciously choose as an epitaph, "Here lies our beloved husband and father, who selflessly devoted 13 years of life to his television set."

Fortunately, one of the most respected moral philosophers of our time has courageously stepped forward to enlighten humanity about TV's danger to our children. "Television is pure poison," she declares. "To be plopped in front of a TV instead of being read to, talked to, or encouraged to interact with other human beings is a huge mistake, and that's what happens to a lot of children."

So says Madonna, in an interview with the British magazine *She*. When even the most publicized princess of pop culture appreciates the pitfalls of television, surely more conventional parents will consider pulling the plug and liberating their families from the tyranny of too much TV.

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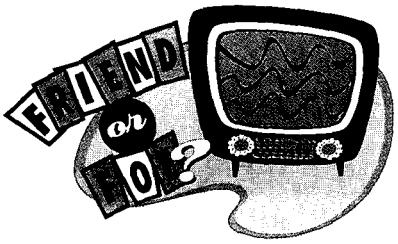
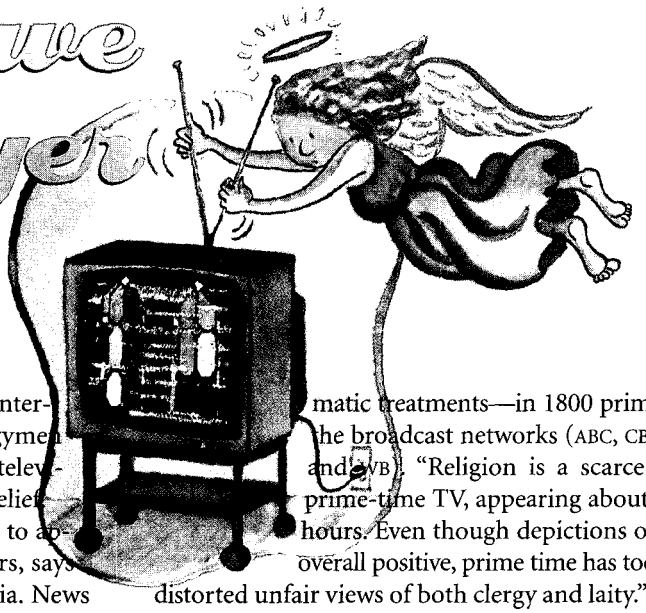
Religion on TV doesn't have a prayer





Whether it's news shows that ignore religion or entertainment programs that regularly depict clergymen as buffoons, hypocrites, or outright perverts, television remains ground zero for the culture of disbelief.

Rabbi Marc Gellman, one of the first clergymen to appear regularly on network television in some 40 years, says that "there's an anti-religious perspective in the media. News has created life without religion. That has created a distorted version of the world." Adding insult to injury, he contends, are the entertainment programs that offer "demeaning and libelous" portrayals of clergymen. Crazed rabbis betray confidences, priests are pedophiles, others are just plain simpletons. Few men of the cloth receive much sympathy unless they're outright heretics or rabble-rousers.

Television executives wouldn't dare depict representatives of other groups in such a manner, lest they be charged with "insensitivity" and other cardinal liberal sins. But there's a special absolution for such transgressions if you mock religious folks. Despite improvements on both the news and entertainment side, the general picture remains bleak. For all their purported marketing savvy and sophistication, most television executives seem oblivious to many viewers' craving for programs that give religious devotion serious, fair-minded treatment.

According to *TV Guide,* 61 percent of television viewers polled want "references to God, churchgoing, and other religious observances in prime time." Although 90 percent of Americans believe in God and more than 50 percent attend church or synagogue regularly, religion is accorded relatively scant attention. Television executives invariably justify the sewage they dump on the cultural landscape—such as Murphy Brown's ode to Fatherless America—by claiming that these shows merely reflect social realities. Yet television consistently overlooks the centrality of religion in American life. So much for sociological accuracy.

A recent study by the Media Research Center reveals the skewed portrait of religion that television offers. Last year, there were 436 religious depictions—everything from one-liners to thematic treatments—in 1800 prime-time hours on the broadcast networks (ABC, CBS, Fox, NBC, UPN, and WB). "Religion is a scarce commodity on prime-time TV, appearing about once every four hours. Even though depictions of religion [were] overall positive, prime time has too often presented distorted unfair views of both clergy and laity."

Television also seems fixated on religious-minded criminals: "Law and Order" featured a whole slew of religious psychos, including a crazed theology student who killed three persons while laboring under the impression that he was a biblical warrior. TV movies such as NBC's "Justice for Annie"—in which a middle-aged couple kills a young woman for financial gain—offer similar fare. It's a safe bet that religious people are disproportionately represented among television's criminals.

Again, other groups would never receive such unflattering treatment. Indeed, "reality-based" television shows sometimes take "creative liberties" to insure that their fictional miscreants aren't top heavy with minorities. Yet while religious criminals are over-represented on TV, religious do-gooders are few and far between. James Martin, who writes on television for the liberal Catholic weekly *America,* notes that "ER" presents a wide array of representatives from the "helping professions"—everyone from teachers to Girl Scout leaders. But the only hospital chaplain he recalls is a nun who appeared in full habit, which most sisters haven't worn for years.

Still, "ER" is par for the course. For example, the recently defunct series "Picket Fences" prominently featured a local parish priest consumed by a foot fetish, as well as a shyster lawyer considered by many an anti-Semitic stereotype. To be fair, "Picket Fences" won kudos for many positive religious portrayals. And executive producer David Kelley has treated criticism with considerable seriousness, rather than hiding behind supposed "sociological accuracy." But television's grotesque caricatures aren't

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merely "insensitive"; they mock religious folks in a manner that network censors would red-flag if directed at anyone else. Says Rabbi Gellman, "the last acceptable prejudice in America is prejudice against religious people."

No wonder television news ignores them. In a study released this March, Brent Bozell's Media Research Center (MRC) determined that only 268 of approximately 1,800 nightly news stories broadcast by ABC, CBS, CNN, NBC, and PBS last year concerned religion. The morning programs were even more dismal. Though the entertainment division showed some improvement since 1993, the figures for news broadcasts are roughly commensurate with past MRC studies. And last year, the MRC noted, reporters overlooked a number of newsworthy religious stories—such as the overseas persecution of Christians.

Meanwhile, normally astute journalists continue to ignore religious angles. When heavyweight champion Evander Holyfield was interviewed live after Mike Tyson lost their June fight on account of biting, Holyfield repeatedly praised Jesus—and suggested that his faith helped keep him calm when Tyson turned his ear into an appetizer. But the subsequent—and otherwise exhaustive—news coverage virtually ignored Holyfield's religious pronouncements.

Crazed rabbis betray confidences, priests are pedophiles, others are just plain simpletons.

Still, not all is bleak. ABC News in particular shows signs of improvement. Peter Jennings overcame the strenuous objections of jittery colleagues to help Peggy Wehmeyer become the first network news religion correspondent in 1994. But other networks have failed to follow suit, even though producers strain to ensure representation of women and racial and ethnic minorities among reporters and on-air guests. "I find it hard to accept," says Wehmeyer, "that the major networks do not consider religion worthy enough to assign more people to this beat."

Wehmeyer, who has covered everything from Christian capitalists to a spiritual revival among Jews, stressed her gratitude to ABC and Peter Jennings for their commitment to religious news coverage—a commitment underscored when ABC signed her for another three-year contract this spring.

Despite her sound instincts and long experience, Wehmeyer is an oddity to some in the news business. Many people "assume I can't be objective because I'm a Christian." No wonder this self-described "moderate evangelical," who didn't learn until college that her mother is Jewish, is reluctant to discuss her own faith. She's not the only one. In a half-hour telephone interview, former NBC correspondent Bob Abernethy, who hosts this fall's PBS-distributed show, "Perspectives: The Newsweekly of Religion and Ethics," gladly talked at length about the program. But he was hesitant to discuss his own religious background as the grandson of a Baptist minister and current member of the United Church of Christ,

Most newsmen and commentators routinely insert details about themselves into their stories. But religion still gives the powers-that-be the willies. Rabbi Gellman, who along with Monsignor Thomas Hartman constitutes "Good Morning America's" "God Squad," notes that "several people at ABC went way out on a limb" to bring the duo on the air. The resistance is rather bizarre. After all, clergymen have a proven track record. The Emmy award-winning Bishop Fulton J. Sheen proved a smash commercial success in the 1950s with his show, "Life Is Worth Living."

In their two years on the air, Gellman and Hartman have discussed all kinds of news stories, some with obvious religious dimensions, others not. (After Mickey Mantle died, they considered what lessons even imperfect biblical heroes can teach us.) Gellman has appeared in a giant pumpkin head on Halloween to show folks that clergymen aren't ogres. But the God Squad have their work cut out for them.

Just ask Martha Williamson, the born-again Christian who had to fight tooth and nail to get her show "Touched by an Angel" on the air. A well-informed TV producer tells TAE that CBS's head of programming hated the show and bent over backwards to sink it. Even after its test-marketing proved impressive, he tried to bury the program in an awful time slot. Panned by critics and shunned by CBS, the show nevertheless soon achieved immense popularity. (At that point, the hostile network executive decided to take credit for birthing the show.) With some 20 million viewers weekly, "Touched by an Angel" ranks among television's top three rated programs—and now has the coveted Sunday night time slot. CBS even has a spin-off, "Promised Land," which Williamson also produces.

Other networks, of course, have followed suit, but still seem rather clueless. ABC's fall line-up, for example, includes "Teen Angel" (Thomas Aquinas he ain't) and "Nothing Sacred." The latter, puffs ABC's promotional material, concerns an iconoclastic priest, Father Ray, who among other adventures almost gets "fired for advising a pregnant teenager to follow her own instincts."

There you have it. Priests aren't ready for prime time unless they are "pro-choice"—and counsel teenage girls to just do their own thing. But would television glorify a priest who urged a teenage girl to "follow her own conscience" about whether to smoke cigarettes? Granted, saintly clerics could prove dull. "The Adventures of Mother Teresa" doesn't sound like a cliffhanger. But why are only heretics heroes? And if television is keen on priests uneasy with the Catholic hierarchy, how about portraying priests who dissent from the National Conference of Catholic Bishops' loud opposition to welfare reform?

Are the stirrings of renewed Hollywood interest in religion signs of a great awakening—or simply the latest fad to hit Lotus Land? *America's* James Martin suspects that TV's spiritual revival could be short-lived. Not long ago, television was giddy over the success of the sit-com "Friends" and couldn't churn out clones fast enough. But they disappeared faster than a Big Mac on Bill Clinton's plate. Hollywood fads "last one season," Martin says. "Maybe Hollywood will lose interest."

Given television's offerings so far, that could prove a blessing in disguise.

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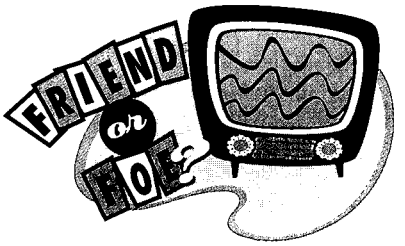
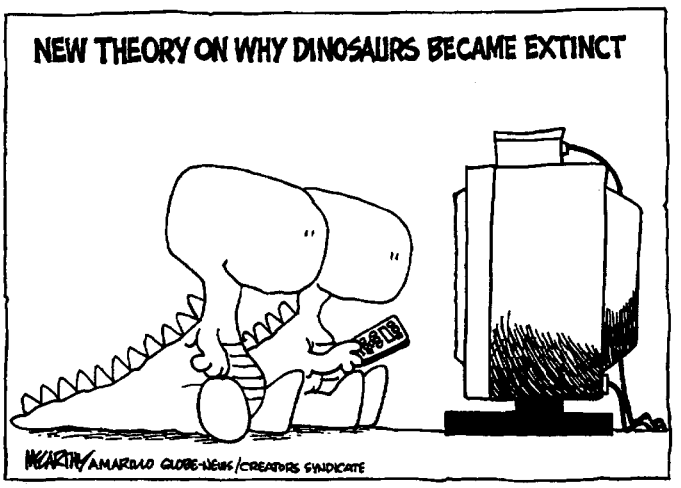
America Unplugged





By Matthew Stevenson

Growing up on Long Island, I watched my share of murders and sit-coms, as well as space shots and political assassinations. I always thought Maxwell Smart had a better grip on the Cold War than did Henry Kissinger. Everything I needed to know about Hollywood I learned from Jed Clampitt.

At college in the 1970s, the appeal of television began to fade as if a shoebox of old baseball cards. In the '80s, I found myself estranged from the fusion of television and politics. I imagined the White House partitioned into stage sets, as government-by-story-board became hard to distinguish from the plots on daytime television. The sound-bite campaigns held no more interest than Home Shopping. In the early '90s, before C-SPAN had a following or the Sunday press shows had redefined themselves as Irish bars, I moved from New York to the Swiss countryside just outside Geneva. At the same time, my wife and I gave up TV, and thus, like pioneers in the nineteenth century, we connect to America only through mail and the columns of the daily newspaper. My up-link to the U.S. is hotel television.

Few things, however, are more discouraging than to fly to a remote part of the globe, check into a hotel with ceiling fans, and then find the company of cable Americans beamed up on several channels. Even in Russia or on certain Pacific islands, I have been awake at odd hours watching real stories of the highway patrol or reruns of "Baywatch."

At these jet-lagged moments, lying on a great mattress, my head propped on extra pillows, I feel like Huck Finn adrift on a raft in the eddies of American culture. In Bryant Gumbel or Peter Jennings, all I see are Mark Twain's king and duke playing the Royal Nonesuch along the banks of the Mississippi.

On these dark nights of the soul, I often wonder if, after an evening of television, Alexis de Tocqueville would again want to observe the American experiment. Would he stir from his native Normandy to make notes about a country that is spellbound by "Hard Copy" or "Live with Regis and Kathie Lee"? Or would he take comfort that he had already written: "I see an innumerable multitude of men, alike and equal, constantly circling around in pursuit of the petty and banal pleasures with which they glut their souls. Each one of them, withdrawn into himself, is almost unaware of the fate of the rest."

When my friend Bill Rodgers got rid of television in 1968, he tossed his into a lilac bush—giving the episode some biblical fire and brimstone. When we moved to Switzerland, we brought with us a VCR and a small black-and-white TV, the kind doormen watch in the lobbies of rundown apartment buildings. We talked about converting to Swiss television, perhaps even color. But it was summer, there were Alps to explore and local wines to taste, and Swiss TV on Saturday evenings features men in lederhosen playing the accordion to women in dirndls.

More to the point, our daughters, then four and two, were reaching an age that required explanations for prime-time rub-outs or the civil war in Yugoslavia. So we followed the advice of the Oompa-Loompas in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*:

> The most important thing we've learned,
> So far as children are concerned,
> Is never, never, never let
> Them near your television set—
> Or better still, just don't install,
> The idiotic thing at all.
> In almost every house we've been,
> We've watched them gaping at the screen,
> They loll and slop and lounge about,
> And stare until their eyes pop out....
>
> So please, oh please we beg, we pray,
> Go throw your TV set away,
> And in its place you can install
> A lovely bookshelf on the wall.

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In place of TV, the children (now there are four) created a series of imaginary worlds that can be conjured up as quickly as the changing of a channel. Old boxes are rafts that cross oceans. Sofa cushions are dogsleds speeding serum from Anchorage to Nome. As Robert Louis Stevenson wrote:

> We built a ship upon the stairs
> All made of the back-bedroom chairs,
> And filled it full of sofa pillows
> To go a-sailing on the billows.

In the evenings we read them stories and, after we surrender, they listen to books on tape. Over the years I have assembled, for the cost of a cable subscription, an extensive collection of full-length recordings, including *The Wizard of Oz, Peter Pan, Fantastic Mr. Fox, Charlotte's Web, Robin Hood.* The tapes link the children to the oral traditions of storytelling that started with Homer and continued in children's lives until TV muscled fireside radio out of the living room.

Since giving up television, I find myself drawn to others who do without it, as if part of a smug club that has blackballed Conan O'Brien. I also spend a lot of time reading about the harmful effect that TV has on children. These books recite the litany of gloomy statistics. By age 18, most American children will have seen 17,000 televised murders and watched television for 20,000 hours, during which time they will have only spent 11,000 hours in a classroom. Last year, according to one survey, prime-time television had 65,000 sexual references. The average American preschooler watches 27 hours of television a week. In most households, the TV is on more than five hours a day.

Worse than its nightly refrain of violence, television denies small children a life of the mind. With bedtime stories and make-believe, kids dwell in their imaginary worlds. They visit hospitals, fly airplanes, or confront dragons under the bed. Only through these fantasies can they try out future character or come to terms with their fears—what Bruno Bettelheim eloquently called, "the uses of enchantment."

By developing these imaginative worlds children can start to become happy in their own company—to rely on themselves, not Disney, to fill long afternoons. But TV makes it difficult for children to dream. Neither cartoons nor even "Sesame Street" require imagination. "Watching television not only requires no skills but develops no skills," as one educator put it.

From a life of TV, children expect only to be entertained. I have heard schoolteachers complain that students sit at their desks with the same expectations they have when watching "Saturday Night Live." But the absence of "something to do" is important in a child's development. As Jerry Mander writes in *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television:* "Looking back, I view that time of boredom, of 'nothing to do,' as the pit out of which creative action springs.... Nowadays, however, at the onset of that uncomfortable feeling, kids usually reach for the TV switch."

Worse than its nightly refrain of violence, TV denies small children a life of the mind.

Not only does television foster dependence on the entertainment world, it also ends the distinctions between children and adults, both of whom simultaneously digest the same disconcerting images of O.J. Simpson, the war in Somalia, or the ritual infidelities of afternoon talk shows. As Neil Postman observes in *The Disappearance of Childhood*, "The world of the known and the not-yet-known is bridged by wonderment. But wonderment happens largely in a situation where the child's world is separate from the adult world, where children must enter, through their questions, into the adult world. As media merge the two worlds, he adds, "the calculus of wonderment changes. Curiosity is replaced by cynicism or, even worse, by arrogance. We are left with children who rely not on authoritative adults but news from nowhere.... We are left, in short, without children."

Some of these adult-children in the big cities imitate their TV heroes by using a gun to settle an argument. I remember one interview with a child who killed a robbery victim in New York. He confessed that he had no idea guns actually killed people. He had seen many deaths on TV, but none of them had seemed real. After pulling the trigger, he had expected his victim to get up and be on his way, delayed only by a quick game of cops and robbers.

Another reason I do not want my children watching television is that I do not like how it projects the image of war. War may be a tragic element of the human condition, but unless adults interpret for children a land mine in Angola or a bomb in Jerusalem, such incidents become either another action drama in television's wonderland, no more real than Superman, or as dreadfully immediate as the shadows on the bedroom wall.

"War makes no national or racial or ideological distinctions as it degrades human beings" is a lesson the writer John Hersey learned on Guadalcanal during World War II—where our children's grandfather had a similar education. But during the Gulf War in 1991, the television coverage of the fighting was delivered in tones of breathless excitement normally reserved for a Super Bowl. The allied air attack against Baghdad, with Peter Arnett down on the sidelines, lacked only a half-time show, and the slaughter of an army of frightened recruits touched off a national celebration as if Iraq had lost to Ohio State in the Rose Bowl.

Whether democracy can survive an electorate that watches five hours of television a day is an open question. Who can understand the complexities of Bosnia or the wealth of nations based on 22 minutes with Connie Chung? Would the minds of Thomas Jefferson, Daniel Webster, or F. Scott Fitzgerald have emerged from endless evenings with the Huxtables?

On the surface, nothing could be more democratic than a medium that projects the image of political leaders to 98 percent of the population. With interactive television, America could become a nation of parliamentarians, with

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citizens answering every roll call. But those judging either Messrs. Clinton or Gingrich are an audience, there to be entertained, not an electorate that is part of the debate. The Burbank studio is no more heir to the Greek *polis* than Tom Brokaw is Demosthenes.

For this reason, I expect TV to become a well-developed medium for show trials, since so many preconditions are present: an audience that needs ever more lurid tales to be entertained, the absence of history, and the popularity of judges second only to that of private detectives. Perhaps Time Warner can launch the Show Trial Station and each week have Wolf Blitzer introduce the victim and the crime for which he has already been condemned.

Television's threat to democracy lies also in its monarchist pretensions. Celebrities are the kings while ideas live like monks in cold abbeys. Viewers are serfs, raking small patches of earth allotted them by Cablevision or Home Box Office. Audiences grovel before such court jesters as Jay Leno or Johnny Carson, who would be better understood if required by the Federal Communications Commission to wear Shakespearean tunics. Televised presidential addresses, however well-intentioned, are all variations on the balcony scene in *Evita*.

Not only is the nostalgia of most television a rebellion against the future, its sense of history thinks nothing of rewriting the past. Only someone with the narrative sense of Franz Kafka could imagine the context in which most programs are set or the suspension of disbelief they require: FBI agents tracking aliens, happy people on bar stools, newspaper editors like Lou Grant. Thirty years later, I am still amazed that television could have broadcast a comedy about amusing Nazi prison guards. As Kafka wrote of another sit-com: "It turns lying into a universal principle."

Television was set up to sell things, not to inform. Its affiliations are to the advertising industry, not the public library, and thus it measures its success by the amount of soap sold, not the number of spirits cleansed. Nor do I believe that with the expanding cable and satellite revolution the abundance of channels will produce a higher level of programming. For every C-SPAN or A&E, there are ten other channels preaching the spiritual value of time-sharing or showing reruns of "The A-Team." As Bruce Springsteen observed, "55 channels and nothing on."

Alas, I no more expect America to give up TV than I expect some day to visit Lake Wobegon and have lunch at the Chatterbox Cafe—attractive as both ideas might be. I do think, however, that young families, when it comes time to childproof the house, should remove television's live wire. Why protect children from Drano but not "The X Files"? From the experience of friends, even those who deplore TV, I know that for many people giving up the tube requires too great an act of penitence—as if it meant a move to an ashram or a cabin like that of the Unabomber.

Nevertheless, pulling the plug on television is a simple act of independence that requires neither a resolution of Congress nor an environmental impact statement. The cord comes easily away from the wall, and in exchange, the average family will pick up lazy afternoons and quiet evenings for the pursuit of happiness.

TV, KIDS, AND VIOLENCE

In 1973, a remote rural community in Canada (dubbed "Notel") acquired television for the first time. Researchers observed 45 first- and second-graders there and in two similar towns that already had TV and compared rates of inappropriate physical aggression before television was introduced into Notel. Two years later, the same 45 children were observed again. Rates of aggression did not change in the two control communities. By contrast, the rate of aggression among Notel children increased 160 percent. The increase was observed in both boys and girls, in those who were aggressive to begin with and in those who were not.

Another Canadian study investigated the impact of television upon Indian communities in northern Manitoba. Forty-nine boys living in two communities were observed from 1973, when one town acquired TV, until 1977, when the second town did as well. The aggressiveness of boys in the first community increased after the introduction of television. The aggressiveness of boys in the second community remained the same. When TV was later introduced in the second community, aggressiveness increased there.

U.S. and Canadian studies of prolonged childhood exposure to television demonstrate a positive relationship between exposure and physical aggression. The critical period is preadolescent childhood.

White South Africans have lived in a prosperous, industrialized society for decades but did not get TV until 1975 because of tension between the Afrikaner- and English-speaking communities. I compared homicide rates in South Africa, Canada, and the United States. From 1945-74, the white homicide rate in the United States increased 93 percent. In Canada, the homicide rate increased 92 percent. In South Africa, where TV was banned, the white homicide rate declined by 7 percent.

Could there be some explanation other than television for the fact that violence increased dramatically in the U.S. and Canada while dropping in South Africa?

Economic growth: Between 1946 and 1974, all three countries experienced substantial economic growth. Per capita income increased by 75 percent in the United States, 124 percent in Canada, and 86 percent in South Africa.

Civil unrest: One might suspect that anti-war or civil-rights activity was responsible for the doubling of the homicide rate in the U.S. But the experience of Canada shows that this was not the case, since Canadians suffered a doubling of the homicide rate without similar civil unrest.

In the United States and Canada, there was a lag of ten to 15 years between the introduction of television and a doubling of the homicide rate. In South Africa, there was a similar lag. Since TV exerts its behavior-modifying effects primarily on children, while homicide is primarily an adult activity, this lag represents the time needed for the "television generation" to come of age.

Many factors other than television influence the amount of violent crime. Nevertheless, if, hypothetically, TV had never developed, violent crime would be half what it is.

—excerpted from Brandon S. Centerwall, "Television and Violent Crime," *The Public Interest*, Spring 1993.

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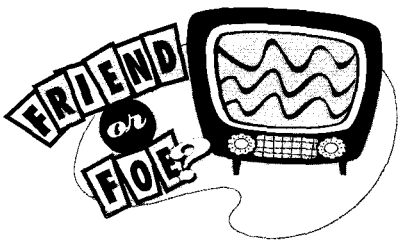

TV-Free

Real families describe life without the tube

By Karl Zinsmeister

Does the idea of killing your TV—getting the box completely out of your house—seem unfathomable? Well, two million American households, most of them families with children, have done exactly that. To many of their neighbors, these citizens may be the ultimate oddity.

Who are the TV-free? How do they live? To give our readers a clearer picture, we conducted interviews with more than two dozen parents currently raising children without TV, plus some of the kids. (*TAE* intern Kristin Moorefield did much of the heavy lifting of conducting and transcribing the interviews.) These families vary widely in makeup, place of residence, occupation, and political preference, but there are striking common themes in their experiences with television.

Perhaps the finding that will surprise readers most is the unanimous verdict of our interviewees that getting their kids (and the family adults) to give up TV was unexpectedly easy. "To our surprise," reports Southern California mother Penny Parish, "the children don't seem to mind that much. They read a lot instead! Our 16-year-old recently was asked by our local library to work part-time because she knows the library so well."

Just as unanimously, however, our interviewees tell us that reactions from relations, friends, and neighbors have often been incredulous, defensive, and critical. "My relatives think this is going to backfire on me someday, that my kids are going to grow up to be TVholics," says Texas mother Cornelia Odom, adding that "one close relative asked how we expected our daughter to learn her letters and numbers, and how to read, if she didn't watch 'Sesame Street.'" "Our friend T.T. said it was unnatural not to have a TV, and that we were depriving our children," relates Montana auto mechanic Hendrik Mills. "One relative thinks we're a little kooky," a mother named Irene Komor informed *TAE*. "When you first tell people, they think you must be a member of some weird religious sect," agrees Dana Mack.

An indication of the disbelief that follows the decision to go TV-free is the fact that literally a majority of the parents we talked to had had a relative actually give them, or try to give them, a TV—on the assumption that the family didn't really want to go without, but perhaps couldn't afford one, or didn't realize how much they'd like it if they'd just try. (This has happened to your TV-less editor twice.)

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Several interviewees said they suspect hostile reactions to the decision to unplug often grow out of the critic's guilt over his own TV habits. In their bones, most Americans now believe that heavy TV-watching is taking a toll on the nation—and in particular that children and television aren't a good mix. When Americans were asked by Gallup back in 1962 whether they considered TV a good or bad influence on kids, twice as many answered "good" as "bad." Today, "bad" has pulled ahead of "good." And twice as many respondents say TV is getting worse as say it is getting better.

A tottering accumulation of studies documents TV's noisome content. The Kaiser Founda-

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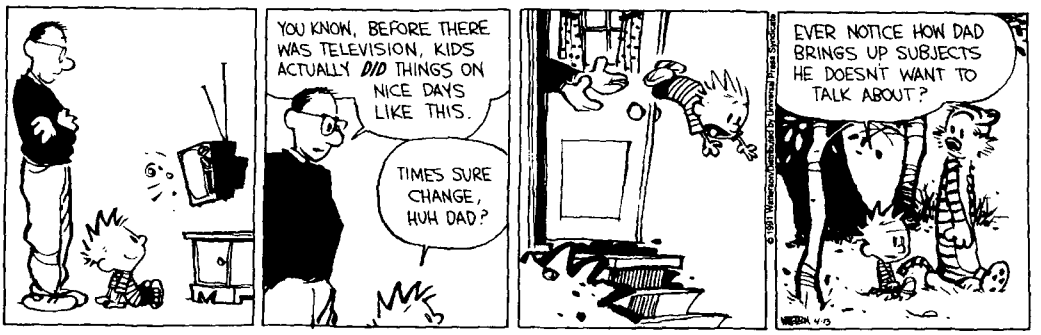

tion finds that three out of four shows in the so-called "family hour" (8-9 P.M.) now contain "sexually related talk or behavior"—a four-fold increase from ten years ago. In "prime time" as a whole, a majority of TV story lines now revolve around the characters' sexual gratification. Portrayals of pre-marital, extra-marital, and homosexual sex now outnumber portrayals of sex within marriage on TV by eight to one, according to the Parents Television Council. Typical viewers take in hundreds of episodes of violence and obscenity every single week. And to top it all off, the average American child is now exposed to 20,000 television advertisements per year.

Children aren't just brushing up against TV's debased fare. In the typical household they are lying down and making nests in it. More than half of all U.S. children now have their own TV set in their bedroom. The average American elementary-age child currently watches 1,500 hours of television each year. Meanwhile he spends about 1,000 hours in school, perhaps 100 hours talking with his parents, and around 20 hours a year reading for pleasure.

One of the most profound effects of all this vegging out is not what it does to children but rather what it *prevents* them from doing. As Irene Komor put it in her chat with us: "Imagine that you get an extra two to five hours a day.... If during that time it's mostly reading that's going on, as at our house, plus some playing, then a lot more imaginative games and exercise can take place, and many more pages can be turned."

As you'll see when you read these transcripts, TV-less families do an enormous amount of reading. "We have exhausted our backlog of household books," reports Diane Wallace in a fairly typical response. "To feed our reading habit, I must regularly cruise the shelves of both school and public libraries. I borrow books...ask what books friends' children are reading.... I Xerox lists of recommended books for children wherever and whenever I find them."

Meanwhile, much of the rest of America has basically *forgotten* reading. In a recent study where fifth-graders kept detailed daily logs for a period of several months, 50 percent of the children averaged four minutes per day or less reading books. For the majority of children, less than one percent of all free time was occupied in book reading. "TV teaches people *not* to read," warns novelist Larry Woiwode. "It renders them incapable of engaging in an art that is now perceived as strenuous, because it is an active art, not a passive, hypnotized state." TV is probably the main reason 60 percent of Americans now *never* read another book after leaving school. And competition with TV surely has something to do with the fact that only 13 percent of parents of 9- to 14-year-olds do any daily reading to their children.

Some observers noticed this year that the 1997 winners of both the National Spelling Bee and the prestigious Westinghouse Science Talent Search were kids who grew up without a TV in their home. More methodical evidence indicates clearly that TV-watching and academic success are inversely linked. At certain grade levels, watching even as little as one hour of television per night has been tied to significantly lower academic performance. Other research has tied TV viewing to declines in family interaction, civic activism, and social trust, and increases in aggressive behavior, obesity, and other social problems.

Most of the TV-less parents we interviewed allow their children controlled access to computers, video tapes, and occasional TV at other people's homes. They are not prohibitionist about electronic pop culture—they simply want to sharply limit its pervasiveness in their lives. Just in the course of visiting relatives, playing at neighbors' houses, overnighting in motels on family travels, going on sleepovers, even attending school, children are exposed to a fair dose of television and movies today. Most of the parents we interviewed can live with that. They just don't want any more.

Asked whether they thought the new broadcast rating system could tame television's flaws, only one of the numerous parents we talked to expressed even mild hope. Several noted that the networks' standards as they rate themselves are not likely to be very high. And a few worried that the whole experiment might even backfire: Ratings could become a way to get even more garbage on the air, on the grounds that consumers have been warned. And ratings could set up new confrontations between teenagers and parents. (Humorist Dave Barry characterized the proposal put forth by broadcasters as "a system for rating TV shows for sex and violence so that young people looking for these things will not have to waste valuable time channel-surfing.")

Ultimately, though, something more than bad programming led the parents you are about to meet to banish TV from their homes. Their deeper objections are to television's tendency to take over home life and slowly, subtly, drive off all competing character influences. Simply by pulling one plug, these parents believe, they have solved many of the problems plaguing modern parents.

"My husband and I find we have tons of time to give our two sons—and they are there to receive it—because we, not the networks, schedule our own lives," declares TV-free Victoria Lord.

When was the last time you heard a parent say that?

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Connie Marshner is the director of student affairs at a Virginia college.

TAE: How many children do you have?
CM: Four. Two boys, 20 and 21, and two girls who are nine and seven.
TAE: When did you decide to make your household TV-free?
CM: About 1985. At that point, we were at the stage of "You have to earn the privilege to watch so many hours of television by doing so much homework (or whatever)." And it was just an endless negotiation process.

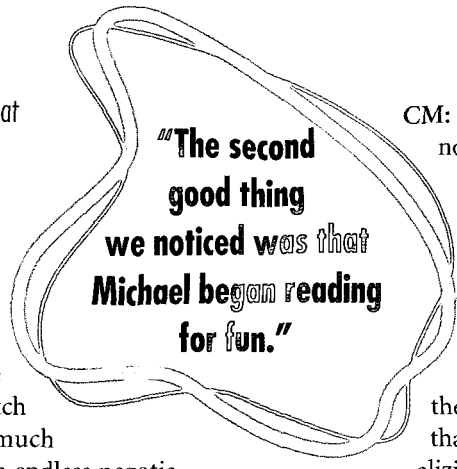
So we had put the thing in the attic. And that summer, a couple of amazing things happened.

The first thing was that the boys got along better. Before, when they would have a squabble, they would stop playing together and one of them would go turn on the TV set. When they could no longer entertain themselves passively in this way, they had to figure how to work out their problems, and how to compromise with each other and keep the games going.

The second good thing we noticed was that Michael began reading for fun. He even started writing stories for fun. Once his mind got out of the passive mode, his creativity was unleashed.

And then the third thing that we noticed was that we could go to the grocery store with the kids and not be bombarded with demands to buy this or that.

TAE: Did you notice any differences between your older children who started out with TV before giving it up, and your younger ones who have grown up without it?
CM: Night and day. For instance, the girls have never gone through the phase, that was so frustrating and so annoying with the boys, where they would "smart talk" us. They have never seen extended "smart talk," and so it never occurred to them to try it.
TAE: Did your sons change over time?
CM: We had fights constantly with my older son when we had a TV. He thought his parents were really just fanatics in trying to keep him away from it. Then after high school he didn't want to go to college; so he joined the Marine Corps. And he saw all around him kids who had lived the way TV would have you live. The kids who have had children when they weren't married. The pop culture trash. And after he'd been in the Marine Corps six months, maybe a year, I got a letter from him, the most incredible letter, saying, "Mom, thank you for not letting us watch television. Thank you for making us go to church. Thank you for not letting us read garbage."
TAE: Do you think your children may be more innocent on account of not seeing television?
CM: I sure hope so. Two weeks ago, Caroline and Cecilia were playing with the little girl next door, a typical kid who watches lots of TV. This neighbor and a couple of her friends were playing a game they made up and named for a popular TV show. And this game consisted of taking your clothes off down to your underwear, then getting in bed and snuggling with your "boyfriend."
TAE: And these were seven- to nine-year-olds?



CM: Correct. And, you know, the other kids sa nothing the least bit amiss in this.

My girls looked at each other, then went out and had a conference in the hall. And they asked themselves something we've taught them, "Is this going to be good for our dignity?" And they decided it wouldn't, so they didn't play the game.

Modesty is a naturally occurring thing in the human child. But if you're looking at TV, that impulse is destroyed without you even realizing. That's an outrage.

TAE: Have you noticed any other differences between your children and other children?
CM: Well, of course, there is a huge vocabulary difference. And imagination. Caroline likes her friend and goes over to play with her, but what they do isn't really very interesting to her, because she doesn't have much imagination.
TAE: What is the broadest reason you decided not to have a TV?
CM: Well, I guess you could say we wanted to be the ones who were giving the intellectual and visual input into our kids. We didn't trust strangers to be doing that. And here's another interesting story. We had a college student who lived in our basement once, and he was a great friend to Pierce, my oldest. John grew up on a farm and could make things with his hands. Pierce would hang around him, bring him a radio that didn't work, and John would take it apart and fix it. It was a great friendship.

Then John got a television set. And all of a sudden, John wanted to watch TV all the time. But Pierce wanted the relationship, he wanted a friend, and the TV deprived him of that.

That is what TV does to the whole generation. The skills of human relationships are sacrificed when we allow ourselves to be passively entertained by the boob tube.

William Marshner, Connie's husband, is a college professor.

TAE: Did your children's social lives change when they gave up TV?
WM: It expanded. They had more time to devote to other kids. So they became much more outdoor-oriented and engaged in street sports: Rollerblades, skateboarding, hacky sack.
TAE: Did you have objections to the content of programming or was it TV per se?
WM: My first objection is to the intrusiveness of the medium itself. A big trouble with TV is that it's always there. You take your kid to a movie and you're leaving the everyday world, you're entering into an entertainment. It has a beginning; it has an end, and when it's over you walk out. But television is always there as an alternative reality.

I also have objections to specific content on television, which is getting dumber and more vulgar all of the time. I don't know which I object to the most, the stupidity or the vulgarity. They're about equally annoying to me.
TAE: Do you see effects on young people?
WM: I've been teaching college students for 20 years exactly,

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and over that period of time I have seen a marked decline in the verbal abilities of students. A marked decline in the ability to follow complex readings, and an even more marked decline in the disposition to discuss complex intellectual matters. When I first started teaching, that was not the case, and much of it is due to growing saturation in bad TV.

TV has also encouraged the decay of aesthetic standards, the decay of manners, the decay of dress. If I had to point to one poisoner of the next generation, and was were limited to choosing one, the enemy to pick is television.

And TV is a great homogenizer. The same fashions, the same jingles, the same implicit mores are spread everywhere by the networks. The proliferation of channels via cable could conceivably hamper that homogenizing effect of television, but I don't see much likelihood of that, since what's on the cable channels is mostly recycled old junk, the same junk churned out of Hollywood for the networks.

"My children have grown up more innocent, more disciplined."

Cindy Slothower is an at-home mother of three children—ten, eight, and five—and lives in New York.

CS: My children's teachers comment frequently that they can really tell my kids have been raised without TV. Their attention spans are longer, for one thing.
TAE: Has anyone been critical?
CS: Yeah, some friends and relatives. I guess sometimes people feel defensive, like I'm going to be down on them for not being like us. They go through these elaborate discussions with me about how good it is to have "Sesame Street" for an hour while they're cooking dinner. And I think, "I don't care what you do. Whatever works for you. I just don't want it around." It's sort of embarrassing. People are always rationalizing to me why they haven't given it up themselves.
TAE: Do your children press you for television?
CS: No, not at all. That's all they have known. During the Olympics we got a set and let them watch a little bit. So they were interested in checking out some shows their friends watched. But it was no big deal when we returned it, and we haven't heard anything since.
TAE: Are your kids readers?
CS: My daughter just won a local reading contest at school. A local Taco Bell offered one taco for every 400 pages a kid read. And it was a big mistake. Molly won 39 tacos.

Another thing is that she still really plays a lot with her American Girl doll. She's staying a kid a bit longer, and I really like that. There is no reason to grow up really fast.

Michael Medved is a film critic, radio host, and author of eight books.

MM: I grew up as a TV addict in a family of four boys. My parents did try, particularly when I was in junior high, to put me on a TV schedule. But I didn't really keep to it. So I wasted entirely too much of my childhood on TV.

Then, when I was 16, I went away to college, and I went from 60 to zero in nothing flat. All of a sudden, there's no TV in my life. And it was wonderful. I just had so much more time. A couple of months in, I realized, "Hey, you know, I haven't watched TV in months and I haven't missed it at all." And then I'd come home on vacations and there were all these smart people in my family, my brothers and my parents, who would be sitting in front of this machine, and I no longer understood it. I thought, "Why are you doing this?"
TAE: So your specific objection about TV today is not about certain programs, but a general feeling it's a waste of time?
MM: Correct. I challenge audiences with this in lectures, in the form of a thought experiment. Imagine a public figure commanding national affection manages to totally clean up TV, so that all you have on TV is virtuous programming. Now, assume that your children are watching more than 20 hours of this a week. How do you feel?

Well, you don't feel quite as alarmed as you do now. But you still realize it's a waste of time. It's going to hurt their school performance. It's going to hurt their communications skills, and it just takes them out of the world.
TAE: Have your own children grown up differently than you did, without television?
MM: Absolutely. They've grown up more innocent, more disciplined. It is absolutely striking, not only with my own kids but with other TV-free households that I know, how different the children are. They lack that sort of brittle edge of pretending to be characters on "Friends."

And they aren't swamped by popular culture. Ours was an O.J.-free household, and I'm delighted with that. No child needs to be informed in those sorts of ways.
TAE: So you're definitely not missing anything?
MM: People say, "How do you stay informed? The news is so important!" Well, first of all, only 26 percent of Americans watch a network news broadcast in the course of a week. The vast majority are watching stuff other than news. And for those who do watch TV news, what are they getting? Unless you're really impaired in terms of your literacy, you could invest that half-hour and read the *New York Times* in its entirety. And reading that newspaper for a half-hour will give you an infinitely more useful vision of what's occurring in your world.

I think of all those dinner tables when I was growing up where we would sit down and my dad would turn on Walter Cronkite over dinner, and then we'd continue watching whatever came on afterwards. Here was this brief period in my life when I'm surrounded by my parents and brothers—really bright and tremendously interesting people—and instead of talking about anything, we'd be listening to "Uncle Walter." When I wish I could see my brothers now, I realize we used to have a time when we'd all sit down together, and we didn't take full advantage of it.

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TAE: Have any friends or relatives or neighbors given you a hard time?
MM: Absolutely. When relatives and friends hear about it, the first response is often "Oh, I have an extra TV. I'd be glad to give you one." It's as if we can't afford it. And then the most common objection to TV-free households is, "Gosh, it will make your kids feel like outcasts!"

My answer to that is simple: The single most important gift any parent can give to any child is the courage to be different. Along with some even grander advantages, someone like that has a better chance of saying no to drugs and promiscuous sex and, please God, nose-rings and tattoos.

"My first prescription for couples in trouble is, 'Take the TV out of your bedroom.'"

Diane Medved is a family psychologist, author, and wife of Michael.

DM: If you talk to people today who grew up without television, they didn't feel deprived. They did many more things in the neighborhood; they played with each other; they were much more socially adroit. They were more inventive and imaginative.

They also tend to have longer attention spans. You know, on "Sesame Street" there is a new image every four seconds, and I don't want my children to expect that something is going to change in their environment every four seconds. That's why children come to school expecting to be entertained.
TAE: How do people react when they learn you have no TV?
DM: People give us a hard time constantly. But, you know, we get as many cheers as we do jeers when we go around the country speaking on this topic. Many parents think they're powerless to change their children, because they're powerless to change themselves. They need TV to relax, whatever. But when inspired, and when it is pointed out to them that there are alternatives, people realize they have the inner resources, and that there are other things they'd really like to do instead with that time.

In my psychology practice, a crucial thing I point out to clients who are having marital problems is that television is one of the biggest destroyers of marital intimacy today. My first prescription for couples in trouble is, "Take the TV out of your bedroom." Television has been a major preventer of communication for many couples.

What do women want? They want their husbands' attention. They want to know what's going on with them. They want to share the day, the world, the life, the kids. And usually when guys come home, they're beat, they don't want to talk. And they turn on the TV. He'll say, "Don't talk to me. I'm watching this." And it will be a way to put off his wife. This is absolutely classic.
TAE: Do you personally miss TV?
DM: No, I don't really think about it. There is just too much to do.

When I lecture on this topic, people come up to me and say, "We could never do it. The kids would never let us." But you know, going without is a lot easier than most people think it is.

Daniel Lapin heads the Seattle-based cultural organization Toward Tradition.

DL: Before I was married I used to speak, as a rabbi, about the enormous forces that work against a functioning marriage, and chief among them were the enormous time demands. Consequently, I spoke constantly about the need, particularly early in a marriage, for a man and a woman to make certain that they dedicate time to interacting with one another, rather than sitting in the same room interacting with a form of entertainment. And so it was perfectly natural, then, when we got married to follow our own advice.
TAE: So the primary reason you decided to forego television was to spend more time together as a family. Were there secondary reasons?
DL: Yes. The second thing is the sense that this was like a Trojan horse in the living room that had the capacity to disgorge invaders. I think it's important not to underestimate the potency of the medium. We were also concerned about the advertising. I didn't want to turn my home into a marketplace where there is a constant emphasis on the things we don't have rather than on the things we do have.
TAE: Do your children ever press you for television?
DL: Strangely not.
TAE: What's your deepest reservation against children growing up with television?
DL: I think it's increasingly difficult to maintain that basic element of society we call a family when parents are trying to compete for cultural dominance within the home. With television, I don't think parents can compete. When it comes to setting the cultural mood, you can forget about competing with the television. You lose.
TAE: Do you see any differences in terms of language, behavior, or schoolwork between your children and their friends who watch TV?
DL: Oh, very much. For instance, they are much more capable of entertaining and interacting with one another. They are much less likely to sit around saying, "We've got nothing to do." They're reading addicts. They do plays.

One important difference shows up in terms of respect—respect of siblings, respect of friends, and respect of adults. It seems as if part of the television message is to treat other people cruelly, particularly verbally. A verbal flip-off is worth more than a respectful encounter.

The youth culture cements many of the worst aspects of television. When kids get to school in the morning, for instance, the very first conversations are often their responses to the TV programming of the previous night.
TAE: Do you ever worry that your children won't fit in with their peers?
DL: Yes. I don't worry about it. I count on it. I think that is just fine.
TAE: Do you ever think that they are missing something by not watching TV?
DL: Yes. I'm very pleased about that, too.

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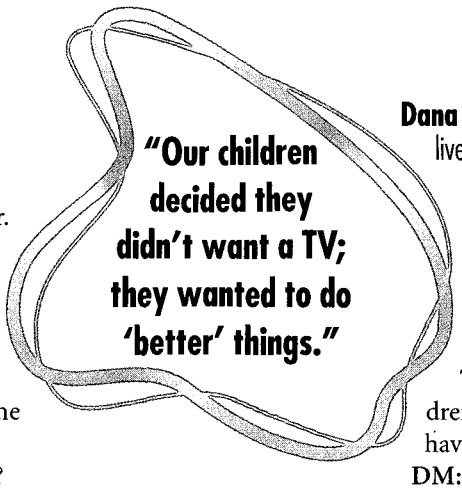
Don Eberly is chairman of the National Fatherhood Initiative and has three children.

Dana Mack, author of *The Assault on Parenthood*, lives in Connecticut.



DE: It was in 1995, as soon as school was over. We realized we were facing another very disappointing summer, with most of our time wasted, and with all of the TV influences on our kids that so concerned us. Increasingly troubled by the dominance of television in our family life, we just decided to unplug the thing, at least for the summer.

TAE: Why did you act that particular summer?

DE: We had a number of very specific concerns. TV encourages passivity, mental as well as physical. It also produces a tremendous restlessness, boredom, and even aggressiveness. That's the strange paradox: On the one hand it's a kind of retarding and sedating influence because it's so passive. On the other hand, because it displaces normal childhood imagination and physical activity it leaves kids riled up.

When we unplugged the television, we saw almost immediate results. One is that our home became more peaceful. Just the sheer noise of television is a problem in itself. And it no longer stirs up the children and produces the kind of aggressive effects that bothered us.

TAE: You've noticed differences in behavior?

DE: Oh yeah. We now have children involved in a lot of outdoor activities, from exploring the woods, to building things in the shop in our garage, to socializing and ball games.

Another irony of television is that it speeds up childhood in all the wrong ways, hurrying children's development as sexual beings, consumers, decision-makers, while at the same time failing to advance them in ways you would like. For instance, our children's communication and conversation skills are improving much faster without television.

TAE: What kinds of shows were your kids watching before?

DE: Only ones we approved of. But that got harder and harder. I think it's really a myth that parents can maintain adequate control over programming. That literally requires that you remain physically present in the room and mentally attuned, minute by minute, hour by hour, to what your kids are watching. Most parents, frankly, don't want to do that, because part of the reason for putting your kids in front of the television in the first place is to use it as a baby-sitter. It's a myth that parents can fully monitor programming. We decided to unplug when we came face to face with that myth.

TAE: How do outsiders react to your decision?

DE: I think it's something a lot of people would like to do, but they just can't understand how. Television is a very seductive thing. Somehow, it creates this illusion of satisfaction for bored people. It's very beguiling to have that in your house.

An advertising executive named Jerry Mander has written a book called *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television.* In it, he notes that "People can hate a lot of television, hate their own viewing habits, hate what it does to them and their families, and still think it's bizarre that anyone wants to get rid of it."

DM: When I was doing interviews for my book, many parents told me, "The first thing I do when I get home is turn off the TV." They told me, "TV is the absolute enemy of family life."

TAE: What about the argument that children won't fit in with their peers if they don't have a TV?

DM: Every day I wake up in the morning I thank God my TV-less daughter doesn't fit in with her peers. One thing I've noticed is that she's not growing up as fast as many of the kids in her class in terms of interest in boys. Children were "dating" in my daughter's sixth grade. I really feel they should still be sexually latent at that age. My daughter definitely is, which I think has to do with the effects of television.

She's remaining a child longer. She's the last in her class to continue to be interested in dolls. She lines them all up and plays very elaborate games with them. I don't know any other kids of her age that do that.

She's always the last one to find out about current buying fads. In fact, her taste in clothing is so childlike I've actually intervened a few times to say, "You might want something a little more sophisticated for this occasion."

Another thing we're happy to miss is the "attitude." Lots of parents told me they feel that television titillates their kids, makes them jaded, and encourages a kind of smart-aleck attitude.

TAE: Do you object to TV's programming or to some broader aspect?

DM: All of the research on television has shown that it puts you in a sort of somnambulic state. It's addictive. It's a drug, and I haven't talked to a parent yet who hasn't tried to limit television. But most with relatively little success. Working mothers are always complaining to me that they tell their kids, "Don't watch TV. Do your homework," and so on, yet when they come home at 5:30 or 6:00, of course, the child has been sitting in front of the tube all afternoon. Especially with teenagers, it's really hard to cordon off unless you make the decision of not having one.

TAE: How about television ratings?

DM: Pursuing the V chip is like handing out gas masks to people instead of establishing some sort of clean air regulations. We have a really polluted cultural environment, and something has to be done about it.

We're not a generation that believes in censorship. But most of us desperately wish that the media would censor themselves, that they would have enough respect for the audience. The disappearance of family viewing hours especially is a disappointment to parents. They say, "I mean, we can't even watch '60 Minutes' without having a segment on prostitutes in Thailand." Or "Why do we have to discuss homosexuality between 8 and 9 P.M. on a sit-com?"

TAE: What else did families tell you in interviews?

DM: Of all the issues I discussed with parents for my book—from the failure of our schools, to unwarranted child welfare in-

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vestigations, to family breakdown—the one that touches them most deeply is television.

Their critique of television is much more developed, for example, than their critique of the educational system. They know television is an evil influence on kids. They know TV is the enemy of family life. And that really bothers them.

Mark Psiaki is an Ivy League engineering professor.

TAE: When did you decide to make your household TV-free?
MP: Back when we were first married, we borrowed an old black-and-white set from my wife's parents, and I found myself doing things like noticing that a good old movie was going to be on late at night, and deciding to go to sleep after dinner so I could wake up in the middle of the night to watch it. I finally decided, "That's enough of that." So we gave the set back and decided not to have a TV, just because I was a TVholic.
TAE: So it wasn't because of your children?
MP: No. Then three years ago we went to Israel for a sabbatical year, and there we had a TV in our rented apartment. We watched a bit of it, in English and in Hebrew, which we hoped the kids might pick up. When we came back we sort of thought about the question of TV again, and we decided no, we didn't really want to do it. Our children unanimously decided they didn't want a TV here because they wanted to do "better" things.
TAE: How many children do you have?
MP: Seven, ages one to 15.
TAE: So you weren't reacting to specific objections to TV programming today?
MP: We've essentially been out of the U.S. TV market since 1981. That's a long time, so I don't even know much of what's on TV here. Some of what I hear about makes me think, "Wow! I can't believe they let it get that raunchy." I mean, back when I last had a TV all of these questions about when not-for-children programming should air just didn't exist. It was obvious then that such stuff should *never* be on.

In addition to time-wasting and moral reasons for not having television, I guess I also object to the commercial aspects of TV, the in-your-faceness of all the advertising telling you about things you need to have.
TAE: Could you tell me how you spend your time instead of TV?
MP: An awful lot of reading goes on. And the kids have paper routes. We just got a dog from 4-H, a seeing-eye puppy that we're training. Lots of sports. The kids bought themselves bicycles from paper routes proceeds and are going off on long bike rides. And we read together as a family. We read the Bible together in the evenings. And I've read aloud, in some cases two or three times, books like *The Chronicles of Narnia* and *The Lord of the Rings.* As the younger kids grew up and hadn't heard it yet, I go through it again.
TAE: How has being TV-less affected your children's relations to other kids?
MP: They fit in with peers all right. A fair number of their friends don't watch much TV anyway. I'm more concerned to make sure they sort of understand their peers, and that they don't have a backlash later in life after deciding they've been denied all this stuff. That's why we talked to them about whether to have a TV when we came back from Israel.
TAE: They didn't press you for television?
MP: No. They were the driving force for not having one when we came back.
TAE: What were their reasons?
MP: They just thought it was a waste of time.
TAE: How supportive have friends and neighbors been?
MP: My dad has given us a hard time. He says things like, "With all those kids, you should get a TV. You stick them in front of a TV, it's a baby-sitter. You really need it." Because he respects us a lot, he's finally sort of backed off.
TAE: Do you think your children are more innocent as a result of not watching TV?
MP: Definitely yes. I try to teach them some of the things that they would learn in a negative way on TV. I try to expose them in the right way to various things that will go on, for good or ill, in life as they grow up. But we're more in control of that—when, where, and whatnot.
TAE: Do you and your wife miss TV yourselves?
MP: Sure. There are certain shows and movies and such that are fun. But seeing TV once or two times a year, renting a VCR unit for one week to watch some videos, which we have done occasionally, satiates us with as much as we want. Some of the stuff we saw in Israel, I wish we hadn't. We saw *The Silence of the Lambs*—do you know it? We should have turned it off in the middle. I wish I'd never seen that movie.
TAE: What about news?
MP: Oh, I listen to the radio for news, or get some over the Internet. I've never respected TV news much. When that NBC thing

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with the GM trucks happened, I thought their whole news operation should have been turned off. That was just disgusting. Yet some people still happily watch their news programs.

TAE: Do you have any faith in the new TV ratings system?

MP: Hollywood could do this nation such a service if they wanted. Movies are very powerful. You see them and they seem real, they stick with you.

If Hollywood would just recognize that they are pushing very bad agendas in TV, movies, whatever. They know how to make powerful impressions. But they're leading us down the wrong paths. They could do so much good for this country if they would just tell the truth in their products. Tell the truth about what happens when a girl starts messing around at age 14. Instead, they glorify it.

There are lots of TV shows and movies that can escape setting off any ratings alarm bells while nonetheless being terribly objectionable because they present a distorted view of reality, distortions that viewers will internalize. The faulty values embedded in most TV shows from "Masterpiece Theater" down are deeper than our blood and sex problems.

TAE: Is it possible to filter children's TV?

MP: Well, to some extent. But think of how most parents use the TV—as a baby-sitter, as my in-laws and father suggested. Hey, if that's your attitude, we've got a problem, because filtering the TV *increases* your responsibilities. So in practice, filtering probably doesn't happen nearly as much as people think.

Josh Harris, age 18, grew up TV-free in Oregon.

JH: My parents both grew up in homes where the television was always on and people were always around it. They are typical baby boomers (both are 42 years old now), very much products of the TV age. And they didn't want their own household to be like that.

TAE: Growing up, did you feel different from your peers because you didn't watch television?

JH: Well, of course there were those times when everybody was, you know, singing the "Brady Bunch" theme or something and I wouldn't know about it. But basically it wasn't a problem.

My gratefulness for their decision has grown over the years. When you're watching TV, there is a lot you aren't doing. You're consuming instead of creating. As I look back on the countless evenings we spent doing other things as a family, the flashing box seems a sorry substitute. The primary problem with TV is not the bad things that are watched, it's the good things you're not doing while you sit there. I'm thankful my parents chose conversations and books over television.

TAE: Did you watch video tapes?

JH: Yes. In fact in high school I wanted to pursue a career in film. We had video equipment, and I made several films. So not watching TV growing up didn't keep me from being interested in technology.

Film-making helped me realize that a lot of creativity is put into making even the many television programs that are repulsive. But the creativity of the viewer is going unexercised and untapped. Not watching television gave me time and focus to create for myself, instead of just being a consumer.

Carla Springer, whose husband is a manager at a major corporation, visited friends in Ecuador this summer with her eight- and five-year-old children.

CS: We realized we were watching more TV than we wanted to, and that our children were pressuring us a lot. If my oldest was bored during the day, he would say, "I want to watch TV." We got tired of being hassled and decided we really didn't need it anyway.

Also, my husband and I feel it's important for our children to be bored for a certain period of every day, so that they can discover how to get busy. Children need to learn how to make themselves happy, and not just resort to turning on something to take care of everything.

TAE: Have there been changes in them since the drop?

CS: Very interesting ones. For instance, our children don't have desires now for all kinds of stuff. During the summers our extended family rents a huge house, and all of the family members meet there. So my children watch TV while we're there. And we come back and all of a sudden they want this, they want that. It fades quickly, but you realize how easily affected they are, and how manipulative both the shows and the commercials can be.

If my children go to other people's houses where TV is being watched, they are allowed to join in. Sometimes they come home and I realize they've watched something I'd rather they hadn't, but it is not the end of the world. It's not that we are going to isolate our children from being exposed to this—you really can't do that. The message we're trying to send is that *we* do not value this, so in our home we don't have it.

TAE: Have you gotten disapproval for not having TV?

CS: Oh, yes! Several members of my family who shall remain nameless act as though we live in a cave. But we read the local paper. We read the *Wall Street Journal.* We listen to radio news every day. So we are certainly not living in a vacuum.

People say, "But there was that hurricane in Florida and you didn't see any footage!" Sometimes I wonder a little what that devastation in Florida looked like. But we've noticed these things usually aren't so important. And they tend to be played over and over again, and I'd rather not be bludgeoned to death with some of that stuff.

TAE: Do your kids go to the movies?

CS: Probably twice a year. We saw the new version of *Lassie,* and it had a little bit more violence that we would have liked. Then at one point some kids in the movie get angry and say of another character, "He's just a faggot." In a children's movie! My husband and I almost fell off our chairs.

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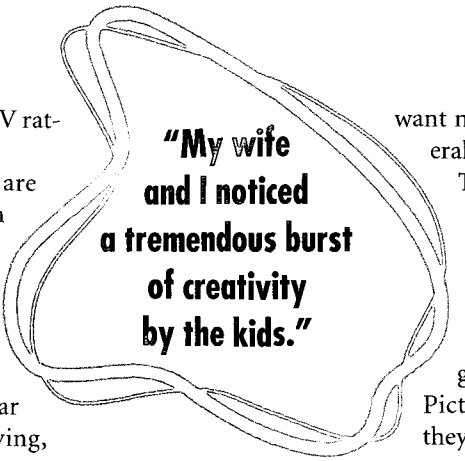
TAE: Do you have any confidence in the new TV ratings system?
CS: No, not at all, because so many things are value judgments. I don't think Hollywood can decide what I would find appropriate. My tolerance level would be considerably lower than theirs. We tried to filter our children's television when they were younger, but it's a lot of work and you've always got the problem of, "It's there, I want it." It's like having a jar full of lollipops in the living room and saying, "No, you can't have them."



Phil Mitchell teaches at a university in Colorado.

TAE: When did you decide to go TV-free?
PM: It was a little over seven years ago.
TAE: And why?
PM: Well, there were a lot of reasons. TV is a black hole when it comes to absorbing time. You watch TV for the same reason some people climb mountains—because it's there. It has a narcotic effect; it anesthetizes children so they can't hear what parents are saying, what anybody else is saying. It changes the way people perceive reality.
TAE: Did part of your decision have to do with having children?
PM: You bet. Terrible values on television; everybody agrees on that. It's one place I agree with feminists. One reason that we got rid of television is the terrible image it has of women. Watch any commercials lately?
TAE: What were some of your other objections?
PM: Some author I once read put it this way: Television is like meeting someone and inviting them to come and live in your house. And they come and they sit in your living room and they curse, and they drink, and they tell your children dirty stories; they try to persuade your children be immoral or to use drugs, to resolve sibling problems through homicide or beating each other up. If you had somebody like that in your house you'd probably ask them to leave. But most people *do* have something like that in their homes, occupying the place of a household deity. TV is a loaded gun pointed at the souls of our children. Other than that [laughs], I don't have any problem with it.
TAE: You had TV until your oldest child was eight?
PM: Right. And the kids didn't squawk a bit about losing it. My wife has an explanation for that. She says, "If you were a little child, would you rather watch TV or have your mom and dad play games with you and read to you and sing to you?" TV is a wonderful baby-sitter if you don't mind Cyclops minding your children. The one-eyed monster.
TAE: What were your viewing habits before you cut it off?
PM: We were pretty strict. We let the kids watch "Sesame Street" and "National Geographic" programs—PBS kind of stuff. But I'm a huge sports fan, and that was a big part of what we watched. The problem with watching sports is the commercials. The Swedish Bikini Team and all that; I mean here you have virtually naked women trying to get you to buy beer. I'm not sure I want my eight-year-old son watching that several thousand times.
TAE: Did family behavior change after the cut-off?
PM: My wife and I noticed a tremendous burst, almost an explosion, of creativity. Shortly after, my wife's parents came for Christmas, and they received many, many gifts that had been handmade by my kids. Pictures they had drawn, craft-type things they'd done.

My children conduct plays. They play games. They sing. My 15-year-old is writing a science fiction novel. I doubt it will be any good, but he's better off writing it than watching "NYPD Blue." Oh—and they play music: Piano and flute and keyboard. Hours and hours.
TAE: What about reading?
PM: They read an enormous amount. I poll my students at the university almost every semester and ask how many have read more than they've watched TV and films. And it's usually one out of 25. With my children, it will be eight out of eight.
TAE: How else are they different?
PM: More innocent. They are introduced to sexual themes in a very different way. I get to do it, instead of having "Baywatch" do it. And we see less of the coarseness and cynicism I notice in a lot of my Generation X students at the university.
TAE: Has anyone given you grief about not having a TV?
PM: You bet. My relatives think I am some kind of Luddite and my children are not going to be prepared to face the rigors of the twenty-first century. I also feel that a lot of people think in their own heart that they should get rid of their TV, but just haven't had the guts to do it. Especially liberals at the university, who are really hostile to a lot of what is on TV, but they all have them.

I have to give all of the credit to my wife. I would never have gotten rid of television if my wife hadn't strongly lobbied for it. And I would bet that in most families where the TV is considered offensive, that the woman is lobbying harder to get rid of it than the man. I could be wrong about that, but my personal experience has been that way.
TAE: Do your children go to the movies?
PM: Yeah, occasionally. My students at university think that our kids all live in closets and I slide food under the door. Actually, they have a very vibrant social life and lots of friends. We go to museums, we travel, we hike, we do nature stuff. We're out all the time.
TAE: Do they use computers?
PM: You bet, but we have to limit the amount of games that are played. We're very selective about video games.
TAE: That's easier than controlling TV?
PM: Vastly. If you have a TV in your home, the programming comes to you, you don't have to bring it home. And the children will be pestering you to watch it all the time. So the easiest thing is just not to have it there. In this case, I think, abstention is better than moderation.

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Transcript

WORDS WORTH REPEATING

HOW TO FIX HOLLYWOOD

By Ben Stein

I became interested in television because I was teaching at the University of California at Santa Cruz in the early '70s. I was, as far as I knew, the only Republican on campus. So I watched a lot of TV, and I noticed a pattern. The adventure shows and comedy shows seemed to be extremely anti-business, anti-rich, anti-capital, anti-military, and anti-establishment.

The standard plot was about a big-city detective wandering into a small town. His car breaks down, he gets seduced by a girl at the local bar, and then he is drugged in his hotel room and he wakes up and the girl is dead next to him and he is accused of the crime by the local sheriff. It turns out, after he escapes from jail and makes friends with the only divorcée or non-white person in town, that the murderer was actually the owner of the local utility or the local bank, and they were all covering up another murder by a local developer who was trying to put up a nuclear power plant. Very often the local minister was also involved in the cover-up.

The standard comedy plot was for the Jeffersons or Mary Tyler Moore or the greatest of all comedy couples, Lucy and Desi, to be visited by a rich person who shows contempt for them, despises them, condescends to them, and they somehow turn the tables.

Just recently I saw a rerun of "Archie Bunker's Place," the unfunny sequel to "All in the Family." Archie is a bar owner in Queens, and the Ku Klux Klan starts a chapter in his neighborhood, and he is the only one who refuses to join. The Klan in Queens, of course, is a *gigantic* problem.

I also noticed a pattern in movies. If it was an adventure movie, the businessmen were usually murderers and gangsters, and the gangsters were usually businessmen. I think of the later James Bond movies where the villains switched from being agents of the Soviet Union to being large-scale international businessmen. More recently, I think of *The Shawshank Redemption*: innocent people thrown in jail, the warden of the prison turns out to be a businessman—or at least an embezzler, which is the same as a businessman in the mass media—and he is also a Scripture-quoting maniac-hypocrite as well as a drooling sadist. The only good people are criminals and prisoners.

I would love for someone to bring cameras into a meeting of the Writers Guild of America West. It is an astonishing sight. Outside are acres of Porsches and BMWs and Mercedes and inside are people talking about the bosses and the exploiters and the rights of the workers. And they really believe that. At least ten years ago they did.

An example: Recently I was at an animal-rights benefit, and sitting near me was a beautiful movie star who was talking in extreme terms about the exploitation of workers in this country. I learned, almost at the same time, that in her contract for her next movie, it is specified that when she goes on location, the shower water in her trailer must only be Evian. This is not a joke. I don't know what is in her toilet. She gets $12 million for 12 weeks' work, but she still thinks of herself as a revolutionary.

The generation of immigrant furriers who built Hollywood could compare America with Poland or Russia and say, "My God, America is paradise"—and it *is* paradise. Their children and grandchildren, who ran Hollywood when I arrived, compared America with a mythical template of perfection and found it wanting. They often were angry at what they believed were slights against them because of their immigrant background.

This has changed dramatically in recent years. There are still a few shows on TV—"Picket Fences" in particular—that are left-wing, but the giant power shows that make bills for the networks have become apolitical. "Seinfeld" is a hilarious show. What are its politics? I recently worked on an episode, and they had a good opportunity to make fun of business executives. Instead they made fun of the employees. The writers, people I spent a lot of time with, seemed to have no political views at all. Their only political view is they would like to make even more money than they do.

"Married with Children"? A hilarious show that has many opportunities to take a swipe at rich people—and almost never does. "Married with Children" is astonishing because it is the first show on TV to tell people their problems are their own fault. Someday it will be recognized as a breakthrough, because unlike Norman Lear's shows, God bless him, when people have problems, it doesn't say it is somebody else's fault. It says, "You have problems because you messed up and you are a lazy slob."

"The Simpsons" is a brilliant show. There are evil businessmen but there are also evil Kennedys. Women's rights activists are made fun of. Everybody is made fun of. The easy villains of capitalists, bankers, and military men are largely gone from sit-com land. There are still some on adventure shows but they are changing, and often now the villain is a disease.

There are exceptions to these changes. People who are pro-life are still shown as lunatics when they are shown at all. This was taken up in an episode of "Law and Order," where the person who was preaching pro-life sermons turned out to be a murderer him-

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self. It is sad that TV is still stuck in that rut.

Why have these kids become so much less political? For one thing, their background is that apolitical and material decade, the 1980s, and they have no memories of great political struggles. Their memories are entirely of getting and spending. And a different kind of person is coming out to write. At one time it was the sons and daughters of factory workers, taxi drivers, people on fruit stands in Canarsie. Now it is the sons and daughters of surgeons and Wall Street lawyers. These children don't envy Wall Street. They know they are better off than the people on Wall Street. The guy or gal who hangs around on Stage 9 at CBS Studio City, just laughing, occasionally writing something down on a yellow pad and handing it to somebody to type up, lives in a palace and has a Ferrari. He is not going to write the same show as the person who grew up embittered and unhappy.

Yet Hollywood denigrates work and discipline. Especially the cartoons and children's shows. The kid who works and studies in school is a loser, a goon, an outsider who doesn't have any friends. The heroes are the dead-end kids who miraculously save the day and get the girl. Children are relentlessly taught that the things their parents teach them are foolish, and the only really cool children are ones who, at the end of the show, can make the parents admit that they have been wrong.

YOU CHANGE INSTITUTIONS

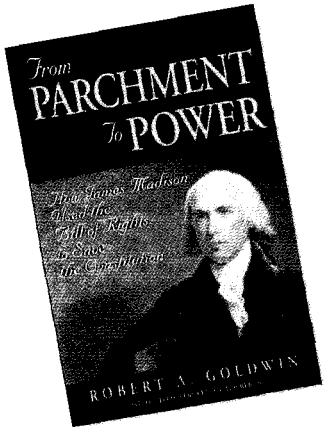
NOT BY YELLING AT THEM

BUT BY GETTING INSIDE THEM.

Hollywood says nothing positive about God or religion or even reliance on a higher moral authority. (The moral authority in movies is the gun.) It is interesting to be among people in Hollywood and try to talk about God or religion, because if they are what we call "above the line"—writers, producers, directors, featured actors—they will laugh at you. They will think you are crazy or pulling their leg. But if you are talking to the stagehands or the lighting man or the makeup women, they believe in Him 100 percent. The end of this story, though, is that Hollywood has made gigantic progress. It needs to do a lot better, but there is something both wrong and futile about even the best-intentioned people preaching, "Hollywood, you have to change." You change institutions not by yelling at them but by getting inside them.

The solution is to have talented, aggressive young people (who don't need to earn a living for a long while) come out to Hollywood, work their way up, and start expressing themselves in what they write and produce. "Seinfeld" is not non-leftist because anybody yelled at them. Same for "The Simpsons." Different kinds of people started writing the shows. We need different kinds of people in Hollywood. We are already getting some. We need even more.

This is excerpted from a May 1997 Bradley Lecture delivered at the American Enterprise Institute by actor/author/lawyer Ben Stein.



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In Real Life

THE DAILY WORK OF AMERICANS

SOFTBALL DYNASTY

By Blake Hurst

The catcher is 60 and has a heart condition. She is also my mother. The first baseman is 61 and has lost a step. Let's face it: Dad didn't have a step to lose. They've hidden me in right field. One summer, when I was 16, I played on a baseball team with ten players. It was awfully lonely in the dugout while everybody else was out in the field. I don't think we won a game all summer. It's a little hard to accept that you are the worst player on the worst team in the league.

After two knee surgeries, my wife, Julie, plays intermittently. She was the only family member who could run well, and now it is painful for her, and for me, when she runs at all. My two brothers play shortstop and left field. One of my sisters-in-law plays second base. She is the best hitter on the team, but four pregnancies have robbed her of her speed. She has an unorthodox fielding style, stopping all ground balls with her shins, and then throwing the runner out. My youngest brother recently married, and his wife now plays catcher after Mom starts having chest pains. The third generation rides the bench, although a couple of them are excellent athletes. But as long as I'm paying for their Nikes and car insurance, I'm starting.

My family fields this team in two coed softball tournaments every summer, and if it isn't clear by now, we aren't very good. Coed softball is slow-pitch, played with five men and five women per team. The men and women must alternate in the batting order, and if a man walks, the woman following him in the batting order also walks. Two walks thus result in a run scored and the bases loaded, so your pitcher must have good control. This fact has caused some family difficulties. Dad was our first pitcher,

I DON'T THINK WE WON A GAME ALL SUMMER. IT'S A LITTLE HARD TO ACCEPT THAT YOU ARE THE WORST PLAYER ON THE WORST TEAM IN THE LEAGUE.

and he had a little trouble with his control. In fact, we lost our first several games by an average margin of 20 runs. It's tough to put your father on the waiver wire, so I let my brother do it.

But we have a wonderful time. It's easy to forget, when you read about player strikes and Dennis Rodman's latest antics, that sport is supposed to be fun. That has been particularly hard to remember here in northwest Missouri, where most of our sports news comes out of Nebraska. (Question: When you see two Nebraska football players riding in the back seat of a car, who is driving? Answer: the sheriff.) But sport as practiced by our family is simply for fun. Though we try very hard, the thrill of victory and the agony of defeat are both rather muted.

We are no strangers to a more physical kind of agony, however. Team members have had two pulled hamstrings, two broken bones, cartilage tears, and more sore muscles and strawberries from sliding than you can count. It is a truly sublime sight to see a 250-pound farmer attempting to slide into second base. On one 105-degree July day, a sister of one of our players collapsed from heat exhaustion and was rushed to the hospital.

Tournaments sometimes last until well past midnight. By the fifth or sixth game of the day, muscles are stiffening and the will to win is burning less brightly. By the seventh or eighth game, the second loss in a double-elimination tournament is akin to the end of the First World War. We don't really care who won. We're just glad it's over.

All my aches and pains have healed, but I still remember the catch I made seven years ago on a deep fly ball hit to right field. This selective memory is endemic to all who participate in sports, and no doubt explains why professional players hang around long after they should leave. All of us have forgotten how bad we look in short pants, and we are quick to overlook the plays we can no longer make. Instead, we are making plans for next year's tournament. One of us is on the 270-day disabled list due to pregnancy. Our pitcher has signed a free-agent contract with a bank in another town and will have to be replaced. But we're optimistic about our chances. In fact, this year we may even practice.

Blake Hurst is a regular contributor to The American Enterprise.

BACK FROM THE BRINK

By Daniel Zanoza

I never thought I'd hear the words heroin and chic mentioned in the same sentence. But lately the two have been paired, in movies and other pop culture. This shakes me to my very soul, as I recall the private hell that heroin brought to my life for over 20 years.

A single decision can determine one's life path. My seminal moment came on my nineteenth birthday. A friend stopped by to help me celebrate. At the time, I'd been experimenting with all kinds of illicit drugs. Marijuana had been the first. Soon the world was a veritable candy store: alcohol, uppers, downers, psychedelics—there was a pharmaceuti-

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cal cocktail for every mood. Combine this with the invincibility of youth, and life became one long party. Or so it seemed. My true goal was self-anesthetization from the pains of life.

On my nineteenth birthday, however, I crossed a further threshold. For the first time, I tried heroin, and the drug became my life partner for the next two decades.

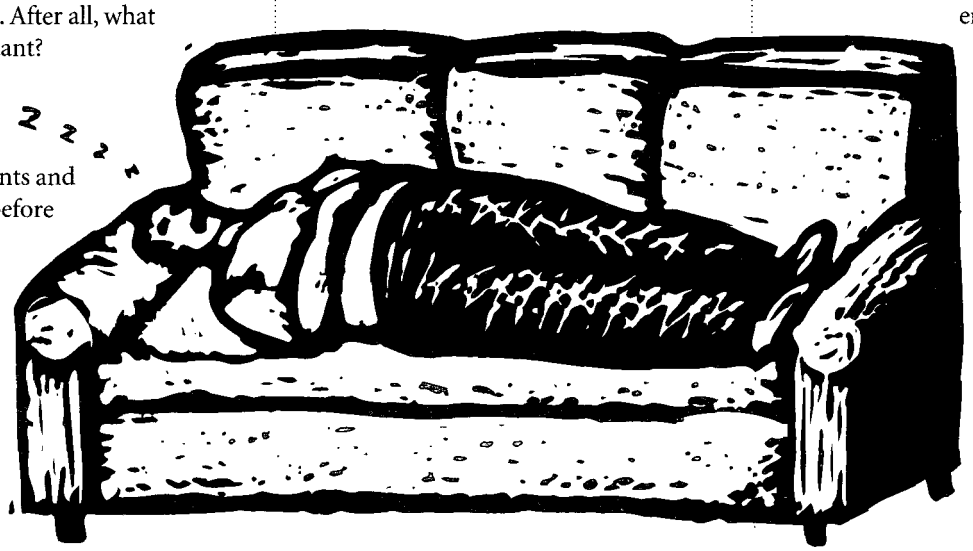
At first, there were no meetings in dark alleys or dingy bars. Drug use was easy and attractive. Heroin was just another adventure. A negative experience might have been the best thing to happen on that nineteenth birthday, but that wasn't the case. I felt right at home in the sedated euphoria caused by the drug.

The insidious danger of heroin is that in early use, you're in control. You feel you can take it or leave it; therefore, quitting holds no urgency.

Year after year passed. I went to school and became a social worker. It was all right; I just needed to use responsibly. Can you believe that? A responsible heroin addict.

By age 30, the addiction was a way of life. The pain was great; an all-consuming dull throb of hopelessness and dependence that possessed my life. Greeting the day was a chore of the greatest magnitude. Sometimes I would sleep until 5:00 P.M. because the light was too revealing. I was a creature of the night, a vampire sucking family and friends for all they were worth.

No, I didn't commit any armed robberies or burglaries, but rarely did a gift or any item of value last for long. Sold or returned for cash. After all, what was really important? Heroin was my god. It came before parents and friends. It came before a job. It came before food and shelter. Often, it came before life itself.



Most current and former drug addicts like me will tell you that legalization of drugs is a terrible idea—and that includes marijuana. Marijuana was the first drug used by the vast majority of us, and recent research has shown it works on the brain in precisely the same ways "harder" drugs like cocaine and heroin do. That's why scientists now describe marijuana as a natural "gateway" to stronger narcotics.

Decriminalization or legalization would only create greater access to drugs. With the explosion of teenage drug use during the last four years, the last thing America should be thinking about is making drugs more accessible. One of the strongest deterrents to using drugs today is simply the fact that they are illegal.

Unlike other unhealthful "temptations," drugs actually exert a chemical power over their users. I've asked advocates of drug legalization, "What do we do with people who have been up for three days on a cocaine bender?" There is a psychosis that grips such a person, and their binge ends only when they run out of funds, or consciousness. Some dastardly crimes are committed by people under the influence of drugs. What do we do with such people if there is legalization? Give them a ticket and send them down the road to kill my family or yours? Or create a one-stop dispensary where an abuser can obtain the drug until his heart seizes?

GREETING THE DAY WAS A CHORE OF THE GREATEST MAGNITUDE. SOMETIMES I WOULD SLEEP UNTIL 5:00 P.M. BECAUSE THE LIGHT WAS TOO REVEALING.

In my own case, even a new faith wasn't enough to break the drug stranglehold at first. I expected a miraculous deliverance. God would do all the work; I would just sit back and wait. But that deliverance never came. It wasn't that easy: recovery takes strenuous effort. A substance abuser, I learned, must make a habit out of being sober.

Eventually, with the help of God and the support of others, I was ready for that commitment—after decades of misery. I've been almost five years in recovery now, living life again. The appreciation of a beautiful sunset has returned, along with my gratefulness for true love and friendship. Silly things make me laugh and sad movies make me cry. The simple pleasures of household chores are no longer unimaginable burdens but welcome responsibilities.

Some of my human relationships were irreparably harmed, but those who cared about me most now care again. I asked for their forgiveness, and they've welcomed back the old me that was lost and nearly forgotten. I have a wife and family who never left my side. I have an emerging new journalism career, and I'm active in public service. I'll never be a literary giant, or president, but I'm looking forward to the future. With God's help, I will be the best friend, husband, and person I can be.

And for me, that's quite an accomplishment.

Daniel Zanoza lives in Illinois.

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the International Economist

U.S. Unilateral Sanctions Are Overused and Undereffective

By Claude Barfield and Mark Groombridge

Between 1993 and 1996, the United States imposed some 61 unilateral economic sanctions on 35 different countries. In 1996 alone, there were 22 new cases. The aims of these sanctions have been to promote human rights, encourage democratization, counter terrorism, prevent nuclear proliferation, promote political stability, push drug eradication, support workers' rights, and require environmental cleanups. Recently, even state and local governments have begun instituting sanctions against U.S. trading partners for alleged economic, political, environmental, labor, or human rights abuses. Currently, 42 percent of the world's population live in sanctioned countries.

We believe most of these efforts are ill-advised. The U.S. should resist employing the blunt weapons of trade barriers and economic sanctions when more refined tools exist that can achieve our ends more effectively and with less damage to our own interests.

First, as most economists have learned, sanctions are rarely effective. The Institute for International Economics concludes that "U.S. sanctions had positive outcomes in fewer than one in five cases in the 1970s and 1980s." Unilateral sanctions often fail because the target country can usually find other nations willing to trade. For example, the United States is currently the only nation that bars civilian nuclear power exports to China. Not surprisingly, France, Canada, and Russia have made deals with China to build six nuclear power plants. This ability to find alternate suppliers will likely increase in the future as the share of world trade controlled by the U.S. declines.

Sometimes sanctions strengthen the resolve of intended targets. In Cuba, sanctions have enabled Fidel Castro to blame America for the economic woes of his country, deflecting criticism from his own failed policies. And even in the rare cases where unilateral sanctions work, there's mounting evidence they harm our economy. The Institute for International Economics report concludes that "U.S. sanctions in 1995 may have reduced U.S. exports to 26 target countries by as much as $15 billion to $19 billion," which translates into "a reduction of more than 200,000 jobs in the relatively higher-wage export sector." A Council on Competitiveness study argues that in just eight cases, sanctions put 120,000 jobs and $6 billion in U.S. export sales at risk.

Consider the gas pipeline sanctions we imposed on the Soviet Union between December 1981 and November 1982. The U.S. Commerce Department estimates that these sanctions caused the U.S. to lose $2 billion in petroleum equipment exports. Yet the unilateral ban had little effect on the Soviets because foreign vendors happily supplied the equipment we refused to sell.

U.S. sanctions also hurt the long-term ability of our export-oriented firms to compete because foreign countries come to view American companies as unreliable suppliers. As former Reagan Secretary of State George Shultz argues, "Who wants to deal with an unreliable supplier, especially when the supplier is not the only game in town?"

Trade sanctions can also impair the ability of U.S. diplomats to help other countries become more democratic and more stable. For instance, unilateral sanctions recently imposed on Colombia—and threatened for Mexico—that are aimed at cutting the flow of drugs into the U.S. could instead hurt a lot of Colombians and Mexicans who aren't drug dealers. By damaging the Colombian and Mexican economies, sanctions could make these nations less stable.

Some argue that sanctions send an important moral message to the world in general and to pariah states in particular. But the morality these messages send is inconsistent. For example, on April 22, the Clinton administration imposed sanctions against the government of Myanmar (Burma), despite protests from our Asian allies. In defending their decision, Clinton administration officials claimed that tightening the screws will ultimately force the authoritarian Myanmar regime to loosen up for fear of revolt from below.

Yet in China the administration calls for "constructive engagement," on the theory that the most effective way to promote peaceful, democratic change is through continuous diplomatic and economic contact. The vast difference between America's treatment of Myanmar and China suggests that the U.S. sets its moral compass by the size of its export opportunities.

Moreover, the U.S. government has imposed many sanctions as a means of appeasing domestic interest groups. In the mid-1980s, for instance, instead of applying import sanctions across the board against South Africa, the U.S. zeroed in on only those goods that had powerful interests lobbying for protection anyway, like textiles and apparel, iron and steel, and agricultural products. Those industries in the United States "who will benefit from protection are likely to seize any argument that will further their narrow economic self-interest," warns former American Economic Association president Anne Krueger.

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U.S. unilateral sanctions cause the most damage when they undermine the principles and institutions of economic freedom and international free trade, which have taken years of painstaking effort to construct. Particularly disturbing is the growing tendency to try to exercise jurisdiction over activities occurring outside the border of one's own country.

In the early 1980s, the U.S. took the position that foreign companies participating in the construction of the trans-Siberian gas pipeline couldn't use goods purchased in the U.S. or even manufactured with technology licensed from the U.S. The European Community warned that such a move was an extraterritorial extension of U.S. jurisdiction. Margaret Thatcher declared that "the question is whether one very powerful nation can prevent existing contracts being fulfilled; I think it is wrong to do that."

While the U.S. eventually backed down from this position, the case alarmed our allies. More recently, our imposition of unilateral sanctions against Cuba under the Helms-Burton Act of 1996 stipulates that any business person, American or foreign, who "traffics" in property confiscated after Castro's arrival will be liable under U.S. law for stiff monetary damages. The act further requires the State Department to deny U.S. visas to any alien (or their spouse, minor child, or agent) who buys or sells any property in Cuba that was previously confiscated by Castro.

The law attempts to apply these penalties not only to U.S. companies and their foreign subsidiaries but also to companies wholly owned and operated by foreigners. Peter Morici, a former economist at the U.S. International Trade Commission, points out that "Helms-Burton attempts to regulate the behavior of foreign nationals outside the boundaries of the United States and violates the sovereign prerogatives of foreign governments to regulate the commerce of their citizens."

Efforts to implement the Helms-Burton Act may undermine adherence to international rules of fair trade. When the European Union threatened to bring a complaint before the World Trade Organization over the law, the U.S. replied that we would invoke a "national security" escape clause to deny the organization's jurisdiction. Should the U.S. follow such a course, it would set a precedent for other nations to escape fair trade rules that could haunt us in the future.

PROMOTING AMERICAN PRINCIPLES THROUGH UNILATERAL ECONOMIC SANCTIONS RARELY BRINGS THE DESIRED RESULT AND OFTEN DAMAGES U.S. INTERESTS OVER THE LONG RUN.

The philosophy behind the Helms-Burton Act directly conflicts with past U.S. opposition to extraterritorial claims by other countries. When Arab nations, for instance, went beyond their own economic boycott of Israel and tried to impose a "secondary boycott" on other countries by blacklisting firms that conducted business with Israel, the U.S. passed strong legislation blocking U.S. firms from complying with the tactic. (Canada and the European Union have passed similar laws in reaction to Helms-Burton.) A Senate committee report at the time complained that "such dictation reaches into the heart of U.S. internal affairs, and attempts to interfere with ordinary commercial decisions of American businessmen."

In cases where sanctions are necessary, multilateral sanctions are better than ones imposed by the U.S. alone, as the examples of Iraq and South Africa show. Multinational sanctions are also less likely to undermine the long-term rules of free and fair trade.

Part of the reason there have been so many unilateral U.S. economic sanctions over the past decade is that American officials don't have a systematic way to determine what response the U.S. should make to alleged infractions of international law by other countries. Congress and President Clinton ought to create a system to determine when sanctions should be imposed. Before invoking sanctions, the President should answer some critical questions in writing: What foreign policy objective is the sanction supposed to achieve? What specific actions by the target country have thwarted U.S. foreign policy objectives? What is the likely economic impact of the sanctions? How easy will it be for the targeted country to find other sources to replace U.S. partners? What will the overall effect be on U.S. exports and U.S. jobs? Can U.S. trading partners be recruited to aid our effort? Could multilateral sanctions be mounted instead? Without support from other trading nations, can the U.S. sustain unilateral sanctions effectively?

The President should also be required to monitor the effect of the sanctions over time and report to Congress annually on the progress—or lack thereof—made toward U.S. goals. Congress should provide for a "sunset" clause that requires sanctions to lapse after a fixed period unless Congress reauthorizes the action.

Economic sanctions have a place in the world. They have been used throughout history to punish pariah states. We agree with Gary Bauer of the Family Research Council, who argues that "you don't want to make the gross national product the be-all and end-all of American foreign policy and trade relationships. There are other American values which are higher."

Yet promoting American principles through unilateral economic sanctions rarely brings the desired result and often damages U.S. interests over the long run. Overuse of unilateral economic sanctions will undermine free trade and the larger U.S. goal of promoting a free and peaceful world. In most cases, a far better way to pursue our foreign policy goals is through diplomatic pressure and, where necessary, economic sanctions instituted in cooperation with other nations.

Claude Barfield is a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, where Mark Groombridge is an Abramson fellow. Their study, The Regional and Global Integration of China: Challenges and Opportunities, *is forthcoming from* AEI Press.

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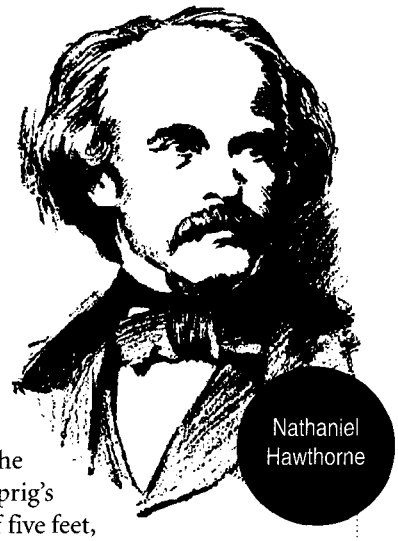
Flashback

TO KNOW NOTHING OF WHAT HAPPENED BEFORE YOU WERE BORN IS TO REMAIN EVER A CHILD—*Cicero*



Nathaniel Hawthorne

From the Outhouse to the White House

The things writers do for money. Scarlet letterman Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote his wife, "I want nothing to do with politicians—they are not men; they cease to be men, in becoming politicians. Their hearts wither away, and die out of their bodies." But that was before Hawthorne's old Bowdoin College chum, the affable Franklin Pierce, won the 1852 Democratic presidential nomination. Hawthorne dashed off an encomiastic *Life of Franklin Pierce* and was rewarded with a consulship at Liverpool.

Salem's Nat was mucking about in fertile soil. The campaign biography, with its often hilariously fulsome tributes, had been a staple since Andrew Jackson was lauded in a volume by Senator John Henry Eaton, whose barmaid wife had so offended Mrs. John C. Calhoun. Thirty such books were written for candidate William Henry Harrison in 1840, as the Virginia aristocrat metamorphosed into a cidery man of the people.

The astonishing thing is that so many accomplished novelists joined the deluge. William Dean Howells, later to chronicle Silas Lapham's rise, first hallelujahed Abraham Lincoln's ascent to glory in 1860, and so he spent the war in Venice rather than Gettysburg. (Howells later penned a biography of his wife's cousin, Rutherford B. Hayes.) Lew Wallace (*Ben Hur*) put Benjamin Harrison aboard a chariot of his own, and historical novelist Kenneth Roberts strove to animate Calvin Coolidge—though his mention of Coolidge's Indian blood panicked the palefaces at the Republican National Committee.

Historian Edmund B. Sullivan laid down the rules of the campaign bio, including:

- "Stress humble beginnings...a birth in a log cabin or on a farm is helpful, or in a small frame house...if the candidate was ever associated with New York City, gloss over that fact."
- "Play down specific religious beliefs; emphasize vague positive feelings toward religion."
- "Ex-generals must be basically men of peace."
- "Stress favorable nickname, if masculine sounding; invent one, if necessary." (Yet how in 1988 did "Poppy" defeat "the Duke"?)

The candidate's rise from lowly station to colossus should be Algeresque; indeed, Horatio himself wrote *From Canal Boy to President*, a life of James Garfield.

Widowed mothers were especially prized. Of Kentucky's Great Compromiser, one biographer swooned, "Much as we admire Henry Clay the...Statesman...yet do we love far more to dwell upon 'the orphan-boy' following the plough in the slashes of Hanover, and occasionally trudging his way, with a grist of corn, to a distant mill, to provide bread for a widowed mother and younger brothers and sisters."

Sophisticated moderns may laugh, but much of the 1992 corporate-media coverage of Bill Clinton belonged to this school of hagiography—though previous generations had the taste not to drag alcoholic stepfathers into the picture.

Surveying the field in 1956, James D. Hart singled out for meritorious silk-purse-making the McKinley biographer who marveled of his subject that "his shoes are always polished" and "he shaves himself...never cuts himself... and can carry on a conversation while cutting off his beard." A Thomas Dewey idolator praised the Owosso prig's height of five feet, eight inches because it was "almost precisely the same as the average of the men in the armed forces."

Hart opined that the campaign bio "still flourishes...as indestructible as the folk dream of the log cabin," but the old gray fare she ain't what she used to be.

They're still written, of course, but men of letters are no longer on such intimate terms with men of state. President Tyler, for instance, sent Washington Irving to Spain and John Howard Payne ("Home Sweet Home") to Tunis. Even Grover Cleveland, Uncle Jumbo, who didn't devour fiction in quite the same way he made slabs of beef disappear, counted among his confidants Harold Frederic, one of the best novelists of his age. Yet when contemporary presidents look beyond the Potomac for ambassadors and friends, they select washed-up actors or rich courtesans. Harold Frederic, meet Babs Streisand.

Saul Bellow toyed with the idea of a Humphrey book in 1968, but the genre today is thoroughly hack-ridden. The ghosted "autobiography" has become the volume of choice. Politicos who shamelessly read other men's words at poignant passages in their lives (Teddy Kennedy eulogizing a slain brother, Bob Dole bidding farewell to the Senate) may as well tack their own names onto the covers of campaign bios, making them autobios and gaining royalties withal.

But maybe everything that dies someday comes back. At this very moment, might some ambitious scrivener be sweating over *Plowboy from St. Albans: The Life of Albert Gore*?

—Bill Kauffman

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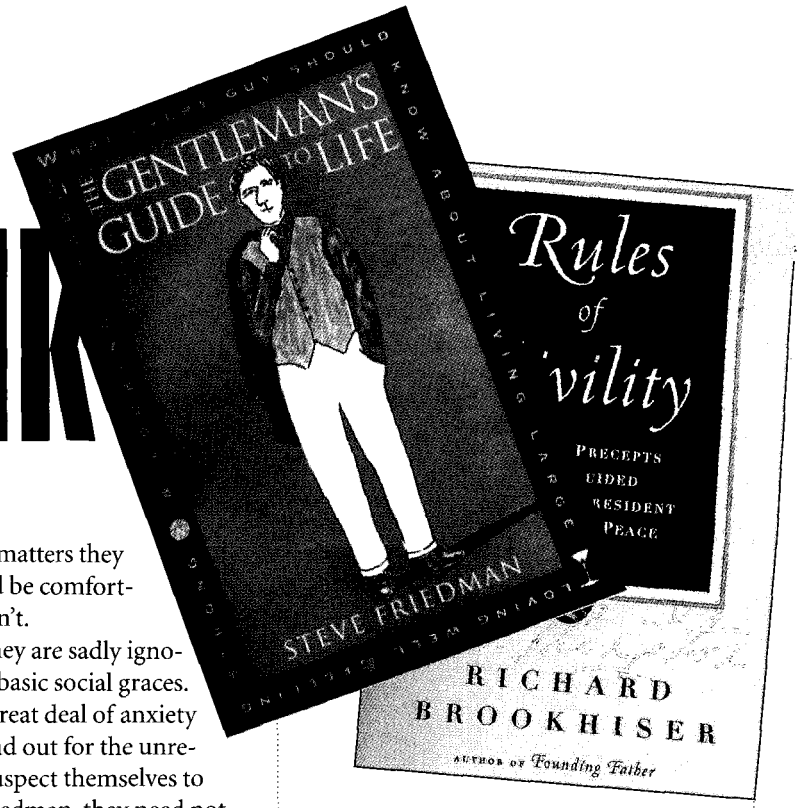
BookTalk



WHAT A GUY!

By Alan Pell Crawford

The Gentleman's Guide to Life: What Every Guy Should Know About Living Large, Loving Well, Feeling Strong, and Looking Good
By Steve Friedman
Clarkson Potter, 176 pages, $20

Rules of Civility: The 110 Precepts That Guided Our First President in War and Peace
Edited by Richard Brookhiser
The Free Press, 90 pages, $16

The intended audience of Steve Friedman's *The Gentleman's Guide to Life* is the American "guy," a sociological type that has yet to be adequately defined but is everywhere apparent. "Guys" can be distinguished even at great distance by the ubiquitous baseball cap, now worn in the best restaurants.

Up close, the type can be identified not only by its attitudes and values but by its speech as well. The author has adopted each with facility. Beautiful women (the only kind "guys" seem to bother with) are "hot babes," eating is "chowing down," and novelty items called Chia pets are wildly amusing. Among "guys," the rejoinder "Puh-leeze!" constitutes the *ne plus ultra* of cleverness.

To "guys," the good life consists of impressing "hot babes," drawing an upper-middle-class salary in a suitably enviable profession and faking one's way through delicate situations. A fear of embarrassment, especially in front of a really hot babe, seems almost pathological. This dread of making an ass of oneself is understandable, since "guys" are unsophisticated about a range of matters they sense they should be comfortable with but aren't.

Apparently, they are sadly ignorant of the most basic social graces. So they suffer a great deal of anxiety about being found out for the unrefined oafs they suspect themselves to be. Thanks to Friedman, they need not despair. "Guys" who consult *The Gentleman's Guide* can take a lady-friend's parents to dinner, for example, without making a complete mess of things. "Do not belch loudly," Friedman advises, and surely he is correct. He tells them they need not be intimidated by snooty waiters during such outings, and he is certainly correct here, too; *sommelier,* after all, is just a fancy word for "wine guy."

Especially in questions of romance, "guys" can learn from the best: "Dr. Mark Schwartz of the Masters and Johnson Institute recommends Al Pacino in *Sea of Love* as a good role model," Friedman writes. "Also, check out Warren Beatty in *Shampoo.*" A "guy" should not concern himself with developing a genuine interest in the "babes" he desires if he can learn to fake it.

Everything in *The Gentleman's Guide* is conveniently reduced to easily adopted shortcuts, descriptions of which are punctuated with wisecracks of the Dave Barry variety. These comic interjections serve to relieve any uneasiness on the part of readers who might otherwise suspect the author of being an earnest silly-billy, a type "guys" distrust. They apparently regard any form of high-mindedness with suspicion, and only rarely does Friedman suggest there may be more to attaining the good life than employing the tactics he recommends. Such passages might put off some readers, who will be reassured to know there are few and they sound forced. Early on, for example, the author says "you must connect with others while remaining true to yourself." Later he mentions "adopting a personal code and sticking to it" but does not elaborate.

These are forgivable lapses and need not detract from the book's overall usefulness. The same cannot be said, however, for Richard Brookhiser's troublesome *Rules of Civility*. Brookhiser has done "guys" a real disservice, and deliberately, by dusting off the fusty precepts by which George Washington tried to comport himself. What is worse, the author explains how these seemingly harmless little axioms in fact involve questions of morality and character not easily dismissed.

"Kill no vermin, as fleas, lice, ticks &c., in the sight of others," reads Rule 13. "If you see any filth or thick spittle put your foot dexterously upon it, if it be upon the clothes of your companions put it off privately, and if it be upon your own clothes return thanks to him who puts it off." The relevance of such a precept might depend, at first glance, upon the company you keep and the places you frequent. Brookhiser insists, however, that Rule 13 is everywhere applicable.

"Don't embarrass those you help," he explains, "and however embarrassed you

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may be to discover that you have been in a ludicrous or disgusting situation, don't forget to thank those who helped you out of it."

"Guys" who try to obey Washington's rules will find themselves obligated in all sorts of ways to all sorts of people, with unforeseen complications. They will no doubt find their style severely cramped and their progress impeded in the seduction of some "hot babe." They are therefore urged to avoid Brookhiser's book.

That is a pity, since *Rules of Civility* is shorter and easier to read than *The Gentleman's Guide*, which might otherwise render it tempting to "guys" whose time is valuable. Brookhiser's slender offering is also thought-provoking and frequently witty in a way sure to offend the intellectually insecure. If that is not enough to dissuade "guys" from buying it, then consider this: There is not a Chia pet joke in the whole book.

Alan Pell Crawford is senior counselor with Martin Public Relations in Richmond, Virginia.

JEWS WITHOUT JUDAISM

By Jacob Neusner

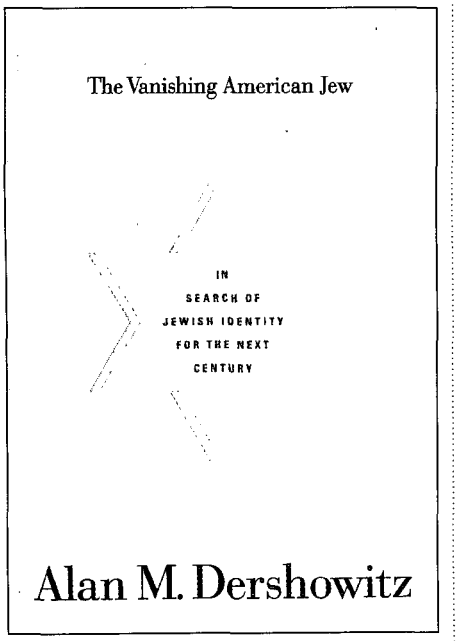
The Vanishing American Jew: In Search of Jewish Identity for the Next Century
By Alan M. Dershowitz
Little, Brown, 416 pages, $24.95

Responding to the personal crisis of his son's marriage to a gentile, Alan Dershowitz mounts a full-scale attack on the religion of Judaism, which condemns marriage of Jews to unconverted gentiles. Instead, he advocates not a faith but a heritage: "an eclectic, tolerant," and inclusive secular Jewishness—an ethnic identity—for American Jews. Our society is ever less characterized by anti-Semitism; "thus we must define our Jewish identity in different and more positive ways than we did in the past." He identifies in the Christian Right ("and their Jewish allies") a principal surviving form of anti-Semitism.

Dershowitz rejects the three leading modes of Jewish survival: the religious solution, meaning synagogue affiliation; the Israeli solution, meaning emigration; and the ethical solution, meaning stress on liberal politics. Instead he advocates, along with a call to action, "filling the Yiddisher cup [the Jewish head]: the competitive solution to the Jewish future." By this he means, "We must adopt a new, more positive, Jewish identity based on a 3,500-year-old tradition of education, scholarship, learning, creativity, justice, and compassion. But first we must figure out a way to make this diverse library of Jewish knowledge accessible and useful to generations of Jews who are abysmally ignorant of their remarkable tradition." Jewish educators have struggled with that challenge for generations, something Dershowitz seems not to acknowledge.

Dershowitz takes a militantly secular position, for it is Judaism the religion that forbids what his son has done. Rabbis monopolize control over Jewish education; so they must be deposed. He shows through invidious comparisons that secular Jews embody all that is good: "How come so many of the Jews who contributed so much to the world were not practicing or observant Jews?" he asks. Jews who practice the religion find themselves dismissed: "Why has the Jewish background or heritage of so many individuals who have contributed so much to the world been so important to their success, while the core of Jewish religious observance has been relatively unimportant?" Senator Lieberman, on our side of the water, and Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, confidante of Tony Blair, on the other side, will find this claim astonishing.

When it comes to a concrete explanation of what he means by "secular-Jewish," Dershowitz admits he is stymied: "The further one moves away from the strictly religious component of Judaism, the more difficult it is to define the Jewish character either of [the state of] Israel or of the Jewish community." But he finds a familiar source of definition—education: "For Judaism to become a transmittable civilization in an integrated, secular world where Jews do not experience isolation, discrimination, and victimization, Jewish learning must become accessible to integrated and secular Jews. It must become usable to them in their daily lives."



Information replaces conviction in his advocacy of spirituality without religiosity: Jewish ethics, Jewish environmentalism, Jewish feminism, and the like—Judaism à la mode. "Judaism must become less tribal, less ethnocentric, less exclusive, less closed off, less defensive, less xenophobic, less clannish." And of course, "Jews must adopt a different approach to the increasing reality of intermarriage."

Unoriginal throughout, except in ferocity of invective, Dershowitz wants to reinvent the Jewish wheel: "Recognize the validity of secular Judaism, which does not require belief in the supernatural, which is devoted to Jewish learning, and which regards Judaism as an evolving civilization." This is nothing more than the language of Jewish Reconstructionism. He advocates, as if they were original, strings of clichés in contemporary Jewish and Judaic discourse. For instance, "The Judaism I am trying to defend...is a Judaism of ideas, of attitudes, of skepticism, of justice, of compassion, of argumentation, and of inclusiveness." I cannot think of a single rabbi in the United States who would take issue, except with his violent rejection of religiosity. He ends with a call to action bordering on self-parody. He plans to call a conference that would be telecast live by satellite, open to mass participation also via Internet and e-mail—more or less the media he used when he counseled O. J. Simpson. So he concludes:

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"I look forward to saying 'Shalom' to you on the information superhighway!" Wow! Who woulda thunk!

Happily, a few of the chapters show a man of intellect, talent, and cogency. The one on anti-Semitism in the twenty-first century is a gem. Here we can discern those traits of intellectual excellence that the amateurism, self-celebration, and impressionism of most of the book obscure. But nearly all the last half of the book ("proposed solutions—and why they will not be enough to preserve Jewish life") form a dreary path of third-hand reporting of second-hand scholarship, the work of a hobbyist, not a craftsman, certainly not a professional.

So far as Dershowitz claims to construct his proposal for an eclectic Judaism out of the resources of Judaism the religion, which he at once dismisses and hails as a principal resource, he has written a work of surpassing ignorance and utter intellectual vulgarity. In advocating learning he does not possess, Dershowitz does not know what he does not know. That is why he embarrasses himself in this pathetic pseudo-theology.

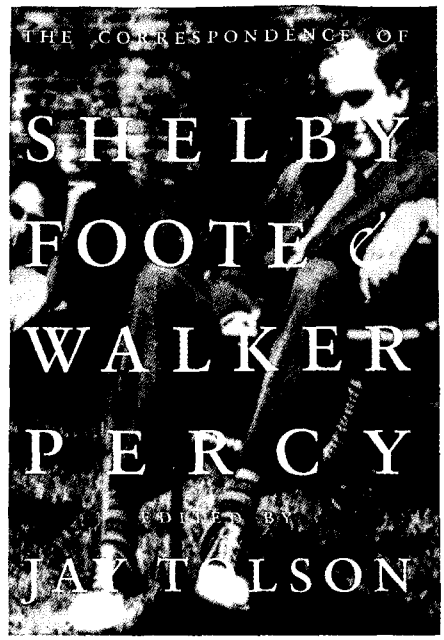
Rabbi Jacob Neusner is the Distinguished Research Professor of Religious Studies at the University of South Florida and professor of religion at Bard College.

THE LAST GENTLEMEN

By Scott Walter

The Correspondence of Shelby Foote and Walker Percy
Edited by Jay Tolson
Norton, 310 pages, $27.50

Do you think, Georgia novelist Flannery O'Connor was asked, that universities strangle writers? Frankly, she replied, I think they don't strangle enough of them. Readers of the 40-year correspondence between O'Connor's fellow Southern authors Shelby Foote and Walker Percy can give thanks that these two friends escaped academe and strangulation. Foote's perfunctory days at Chapel Hill ended after two years. Percy made it through UNC and on to Columbia med school, but his training was almost



wholly in the hard sciences, not the pretentious arts.

Yet the correspondence reveals two genuine "innerleckchuls," as Flannery might put it, whose letters brim with passion for books by ancient Greeks, modern Russians, and everyone in between. The two men debate the relative greatness of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. They delight in Beethoven's Quartets 14 and 15 (with Foote carefully outlining how the former's seven-movement structure "boils down to a true four-movement quartet with certain embellishments"). Percy might ask Foote's recommendation on translations of the *Iliad,* while Foote would allow that Percy's study of Thomas Aquinas should give him a superior appreciation of Dante's *Paradiso.* Foote's idea of a good time is to give Proust an eighth rereading; Percy's is to settle down to some juicy research in Kierkegaard or semiotics.

Though Percy, who died in 1990, gained fame for his novels (*The Moviegoer*, *The Last Gentleman*, and four more), he took greatest pride in his nonfiction works. Conversely, Foote became famous for his vast three-volume history of the Civil War and his narration of Ken Burns' documentary on the war, but his first love has always been novel-writing. In such ways are the two men alike and different.

Their common roots lie in Greenville, Mississippi, where they met as teens in 1930, and in "Uncle Will," its noblest citizen, who introduced them. After Percy's father committed suicide, his mother brought her sons to Greenville to stay with their 45-year-old bachelor cousin, William Alexander Percy. Uncle Will, Percy would later write, "was the fabled relative.... His father was a United States Senator and he had been a decorated infantry officer in World War I. Besides that, he was a poet." The South, Percy added, "was full" of such aristocratic "lawyer-planters. But how many people did you know who were war heroes and wrote books of poetry?" Uncle Will was the most extraordinary man either author would ever know, and his literary and musical enthusiasms spurred the two bookish youths to the point that he became the greatest single influence on their lives.

Foote had also lost his father young. He and Percy were "more observers than participants," editor Tolson writes, "witty, prematurely cynical, irreverent, and generally attuned to each other's humor." When young they loved model airplanes, but "in what amounted to an almost too-perfect precursor of their aesthetic differences—Foote the art-for-art's-sake man, Percy the literary moralist—Foote preferred the kind of model airplanes that were built to be looked at, while Percy liked the ones that were built to fly."

The first half of the book contains only Foote's side (he didn't begin saving Percy's letters until 1970, when he discovered Percy had been collecting his). Early on, Foote was the more precocious novelist, constantly lecturing his friend on art. Their greatest bone of contention was Percy's recent conversion to Roman Catholicism. Foote's initial reaction—yours is "a mind in full intellectual retreat"—stung Percy. Foote believed the move was "cowardly." Worse, "no good practicing Catholic can ever be a great artist."

Foote, still active, confessed to a recent interviewer he was "very, very wrong" on this score, even though he remains an agnostic literary modernist. But whatever their theological differences, the two men always looked askance at the academy. When money was short, they would make mercenary

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trips there to collect speaking fees, and both possessed enough vanity to indulge in the occasional guilty pleasure of academic adulation. Yet they always kept universities at arm's length and believed that what a Percy character says of students is just as true of professors: "fickle as whores." They turned to each other when in need of literary advice.

Tolson wisely errs on the side of too little rather than too much scholarly annotation, provides a concise introduction, and inserts numerous photographs. (For further insight, consult his biography of Percy for a close reading of the correspondence.) He rightly says that we end the volume "understanding these two men almost as well as they understood each other." They are not plaster saints—Foote could be ornery and full of himself, Percy "cold-blooded" and moody—but they are great minds and honorable men. Since their like is not to be found in today's academy, we can be grateful this book allows us to enter into and learn from their rare friendship.

Scott Walter is senior editor of The American Enterprise.

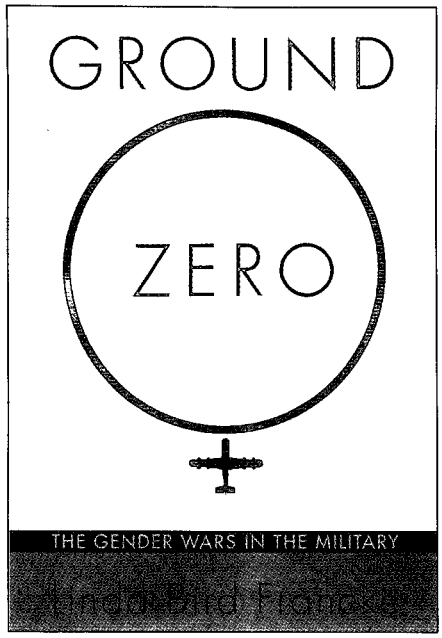
G.I. JILL WENT UP THE HILL

By Christopher Check

Ground Zero: The Gender Wars in the Military
By Linda Bird Francke
Simon & Schuster, 304 pages, $25

Once in a while, a feminist stumbles upon the truth. Whether their motive is a hatred of men or a concern for women, some feminists in recent years have discovered that pornography and contraception are male inventions, more enslaving than liberating. Some feminists even convert when the truth hits them: one of them set out to defend marital breakup and ended up writing a book against divorce.

Similarly, after gathering enough evidence to choke an elephant about the unhappy circumstances endured by America's G.I. Jills—sexual harassment, sexual abuse, sexual discrimination—Linda Bird Francke does not go so far as to say that



American girls should abandon their martial aspirations, but she does admit that the "gender wars" they are fighting are "unwinnable." She's right, and she deserves credit for telling half the truth.

Indeed, Francke's concession is greater than most conservatives who read her book would be willing to make. While they will agree that efforts to integrate women in the armed forces have proven unsuccessful, they will be tempted to disbelieve Francke as she provides account after account, many in greater detail than necessary, of military men behaving badly.

I was not so tempted. I believed every one of Francke's stories. During my six years as a field artillery officer in the Marine Corps, I encountered everything from married field-grade officers whoring in Korea to commanding officers who would not let their Marines off the ship without a condom. "What goes on on deployment, stays on deployment," is the *modus operandi* for Marines headed to WestPac for six months. Yet given this culture of sanctioned sexual license that makes fraternities look like convents, Americans are still *shocked* when they hear of an Army drill sergeant bedding his female recruits.

The real shock, of course, is that anyone was ever surprised by the sexual sins of professional soldiers. A certain breed is drawn to the life of the professional soldier, and if fortitude and loyalty tend to figure prominently in his moral calculus, chastity and temperance do not. In fact, the seemingly natural association between military and sexual prowess, each rooted in the idea of conquest, leads Francke to conclude that "the denigration of women was an integral, and in some opinions, essential part of the military culture."

Such men-are-simians arguments, whether from the Right or the Left, have always been oversimplifications. Rather, certain virtues—chastity among them—are imparted and fostered only in the context of the family, and a massive standing army ain't one. I don't care what your drill instructor told you, he is neither your father nor your mother.

The Founding Fathers might not have anticipated that late twentieth-century midshipmen at the Naval Academy would name their female classmates—and not entirely without reason—"WUBAS," that is, "Women Used By All." But the Founders' injunctions against a standing army may be more relevant today in a nation that, as Francke points out, depends on women to fill out the ranks of its all-volunteer force. Unless Americans are willing to reproduce with more enthusiasm and cut the size of their military, the gender wars Francke describes will never go away. She has, it seems, more sense than the Pentagon, in acknowledging that no amount of sensitivity training will change this.

It bears mention that not every sexual misdeed in today's armed forces finds a man to blame. Many military women have lost control (if they ever had any) of their libidos. My second deployment to Okinawa coincided with the arrest of a few women Marines who were turning tricks for island men with a taste for round eyes. When I was in the Persian Gulf, another BAM (ask a Marine) was selling fellatio on the pier at Al Jubail to her fellow Devil Dogs. As Brian Mitchell observed recently in *Chronicles,* the same sort of sexual escapades that go on in America's trailer parks go on in America's armed forces, and for the same reason.

Ground Zero is a useful response to conservatives who want to blame the feminization of the U.S. armed forces on Bill Clinton. We were well on our way down

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the slippery slope by the time he announced the integration of sodomites. As Francke points out, the conservative Pete DuPont was an original supporter of the sexual integration of the service academies, and under the conservative Ronald Reagan the preamble of the Code of Conduct for POWs was changed from "I am an American fighting man…" to "I am an American fighting for my country…."

None of this is intended, by the way, as endorsement or even a qualified recommendation of Francke's book. The prose is wholly feminist: self-righteous and whiny, heavy on the personal and short on serious analysis. There are better written, better researched, less sensational texts on the question of women in the military. Still the best is Brian Mitchell's *Weak Link,* which, given the scandals that have followed increased efforts to sexually integrate the armed forces, is turning out to be more a work of prophesy than of journalism.

Christopher Check, executive vice president of the Rockford Institute, resigned his commission as a captain in the Marine Corps in 1993.

off The Shelf

A REGULAR REVIEW OF CLASSIC, OVER-LOOKED, NEWLY RELEVANT, OR OTHERWISE DESERVING OLDER BOOKS

A USABLE FUTURE

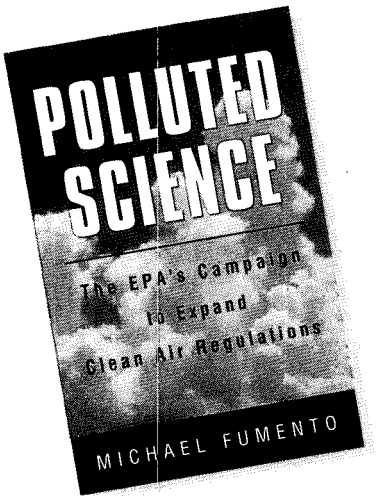
By Nick Gillespie

The Decline of American Liberalism
By Arthur A. Ekirch, Jr.

Although originally published in 1955 and much engaged with the Cold War's chilling effects on civil liberties, Arthur A. Ekirch, Jr.'s provocative *The Decline of American Liberalism* has perhaps never been more relevant. By stressing that, from the very start of American history, forces of centralized and decentralized power have been warring over the country, Ekirch makes a case for limited government and individual rights in a way that is extremely well-suited to the twilight years of the "American Century."

Ironically, for the past 50 years, Americans have often defined our country, our political system, and our identity in terms of opposition to our vanquished foe, the Soviet Union. As a grammar-school teacher once laid it out for me and my classmates during the détente years: "We are not them," meaning Communist Russia. "We have freedom of speech; they don't. We have freedom of religion; they don't." And on and on. With the demise of Communism, however, such reactionary definitions tell us less than ever. Divorced from the ready negative example of the USSR, just who are we?

This is a particularly pressing question for limited-government types. Because they want to reduce the scope of the state's power, they need a coherent historical narrative that makes sense of the American experience without placing the superpower struggle—which



POLLUTED SCIENCE
The EPA's Campaign to Expand Clean Air Regulations

BY MICHAEL FUMENTO

$16.95 paper
ISBN 0-8447-4041-1

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PUBLISHER FOR THE AMERICAN ENTERPRISE INSTITUTE

In *Polluted Science*, Michael Fumento shows that the myriad studies the EPA claims to rely on have been produced by a handful of environmental activist researchers and that much of the scientific community is aghast at what the agency passes off as "science."

In a text that is scholarly and heavily referenced, yet highly readable, Fumento devastates the claim that studies linking particles with illness and death are both consistent and "robust." As for ozone, while it can cause health problems at current levels, it affects so few people that the proposed actions do not begin to justify their costs.

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helped justify a huge expansion of government anyway—at the center of things. By recovering America's (classical) liberal tradition, *The Decline of American Liberalism* provides such a usable past.

Ekirch sketches the development of Enlightenment liberalism and how it came to inform the American Founding. Liberalism properly understood, he writes, "was in large part concerned with criticism of existing society and institutions.... It sought to limit the authority of both church and state, and to protect certain fundamental individual rights from interference by the governing powers.... Sympathetic to the rights of minority groups, liberals were suspicious of any effort to control or suppress freedom of thought and expression."

Such notions, of course, constitute in part the official catechism of the Founding. What is special to Ekirch's analysis is his recognition that such liberal principles have always been contested: "Since the time of the American Revolution, the major trend...has been in the direction of an ever-greater centralization and concentration of control—politically, economically, and socially.... The liberal values associated with the eighteenth-century Enlightenment—and especially that of individual freedom—have slowly lost their primary importance in American life and thought."

Such a frame allows Ekirch to make a full accounting of American history in all its paradoxes and inconsistencies. Rather than searching for a momentous fall from grace—for example, the New Deal—he can tease out the ambivalences of important historical episodes. Hence his complex reading of the Civil War, which he celebrates for ending slavery—"the most direct challenge to American liberalism"—even as it helped conceive something approaching a total state. The "essential tragedy" of the Civil War, Ekirch writes, was "the failure of free society in the North to follow up the liberal ends implied by its wartime goals of the preservation of the Union and the abolition of slavery. In the aftermath of the fighting, both of these goals were diverted to crasser purposes. Thus, the saving of the Union made possible a degree of integral nationalism inconceivable in the older federalized United States."

In one sense, this is a profoundly depressing book. But it offers reasons for hope, too. Ekirch's implicit point that all historical moments are contested suggests that change for the better is always a possibility. Time has also tempered some of his more dour predictions. In a 1967 preface to a new edition, Ekirch worries, "Traditional liberties, in the sense of restrictions on the all-pervasive powers of centralized governments, are losing favor as compared with the freedoms or privileges that organized group pressure can persuade the welfare state to bestow upon the citizenry.... I do not think many of the traditional freedoms will remain in any effective sense."

Thirty years later, there are some indications that the state may be wilting, if not quite withering away. If contempt and mistrust of government are prerequisites for its recision, we are at least baby-stepping—or preparing to do so—in that direction. Here is a paradox Ekirch himself might enjoy: By grounding us in our classical liberal past, books such as *The Decline of American Liberalism* may help prove themselves wrong.

Nick Gillespie is a senior editor of Reason.

"Richburg left for Africa in search of his roots. He found them in America."
—*USA Today*

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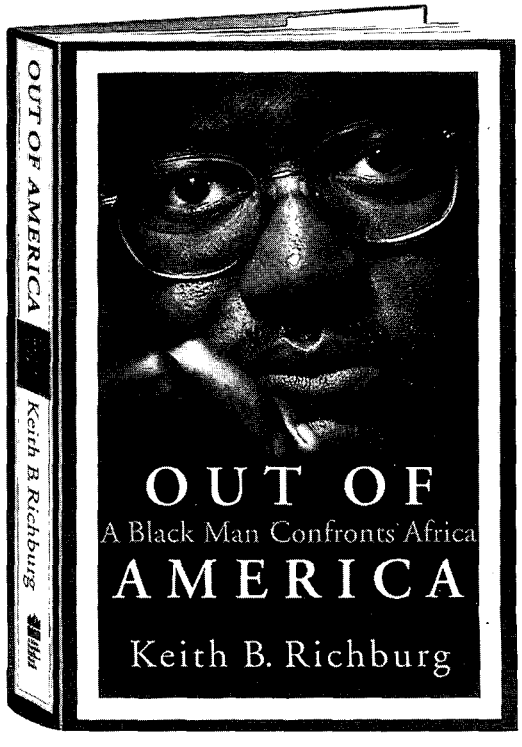

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the Digest

SUMMARIES OF IMPORTANT NEW RESEARCH FROM THE NATION'S UNIVERSITIES, THINK TANKS, AND INVESTIGATIVE PUBLICATIONS

POLITICS

Republicans Rock the House

Gary C. Jacobson, Reversal of Fortune: The Transformation of U.S. House Elections in the 1990s. *Paper presented at the Midwest Political Science Association, April 10, 1997.*

After the narrow Republican victory in the '96 House elections, some pundits argued Democrats could soon regain control. Jacobson of the University of California, San Diego disagrees. Long-term political trends, he argues, show that the GOP should retain control of the House for a long time. These trends include:

• *More secure seats.* Voters are more likely to throw out incumbents in districts where the party's presidential candidate does poorly. Thirty-nine of the 51 seats the Republicans captured between 1992-96 were in districts where Clinton obtained less than 48 percent of the presidential vote. But only two of the ten districts Democrats recaptured from Republicans in 1996 were ones where over 52 percent of the voters backed Bob Dole.

• *Increasing nationalization of politics.* In the 1990s voters are increasingly concerned with national issues such as taxing and spending and less on local issues. Since 1984, polls repeatedly show that the number of Americans who say they are Republicans has increased by about 6 percent. This long-term advantage favors the GOP over incumbent Democrats elected from Republican districts.

• *A "Solid South."* Fifty years ago, only two of the South's members of Congress were Republicans, compared with 64 in 1996. Jacobson predicts Republican gains in the South will increase, since Democrats currently hold 18 risky Southern seats while only two of the Southern Republican congressmen were elected from predominantly Democratic districts.

The Republican takeover of the House in 1994 was "neither a transient aberration nor a sudden partisan realignment" but a "payoff to congressional Republicans from electoral changes that had been accumulating for years."

Does Campaign Spending Matter?

Jeff Milyo, "Money Walks," in Reason *(July 1997), 3415 South Sepulveda Boulevard #400, Los Angeles, California 90034.*

Pressure to limit campaign contributions in congressional races continues, but Milyo of Tufts University suggests the connection between campaign cash and electoral triumph is far slighter than one might expect.

True, incumbents begin elections with bigger war chests, and in 1996, PACs gave $130 million to congressional incumbents, $26 million to challengers. But there's no evidence extra campaign cash leads to more votes.

Milyo agrees with Harvard economist Steven Levitt, who calculates that every extra $100,000 a politician spends on his campaign provides an extra 0.2 percentage points in the polls. Since most elections aren't close, providing a more equal distribution of funds among candidates might not change much. If every challenger in last year's races had received an additional $100,000, Milyo calculates that only two elections would have turned out differently. In the past decade, probably only nine races would have been decided differently if challengers had had an additional $100,000.

Indeed, evidence suggests that big-money influence on politics is declining. The portion of congressional campaigns contributed by PACs fell from 34 percent in 1988-90 to under 30 percent in 1992-96. This drop, says Milyo, is partially because no "systemic evidence" shows "legislators cast their votes in response to campaign contributions."

Domestic Views of Foreign Policy

John Mueller, "The Common Sense," in The National Interest *(Spring 1997), 1112 16th Street N.W. #540, Washington, D.C. 20036.*

"The general sense of the American public on core issues of foreign policy has often been coherent and reasonable," argues Mueller of the University of Rochester. Sixty years of polls show these trends:

• *Most Americans don't care about foreign policy.* Except during wars, the Iranian hostage crisis of 1979-80, and nuclear saber-rattling in the early 1980s, Americans overwhelmingly favor domestic issues. But Americans are not isolationists. Polls show that Americans advocate interventionism as long as many casualties are not suffered.

• *The press's influence is relatively small.* There's no evidence the media successfully seduce the people into supporting a particular foreign policy position. Mueller argues there's no "CNN effect" of increased support for U.S. intervention based on television reportage. Despite numerous TV stories on Bosnia, Rwanda, or Haiti, "the public saw no serious threat to American security that could justify risking American lives."

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• *In presidential politics foreign policy issues continue to decline.* George Bush's efforts to be a "foreign policy president" hardly helped him in 1992, while Bill Clinton's foreign policy addresses had no influence on voters last year. Nor did voters particularly care about President Clinton's successful free trade agreements.

Barring major crises, such as terrorism intensifying or rogue nations acquiring nuclear weapons, Mueller believes the typical American's interest in foreign policy will continue to diminish. "Given the record" of the public's "general good sense," he concludes, "that is perhaps not such a tragedy."

ECONOMICS

Technology Equals Growth

Jeremy Greenwood, The Third Industrial Revolution: Technology, Productivity, and Income Inequality. *AEI Press, 1150 17th Street N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.*

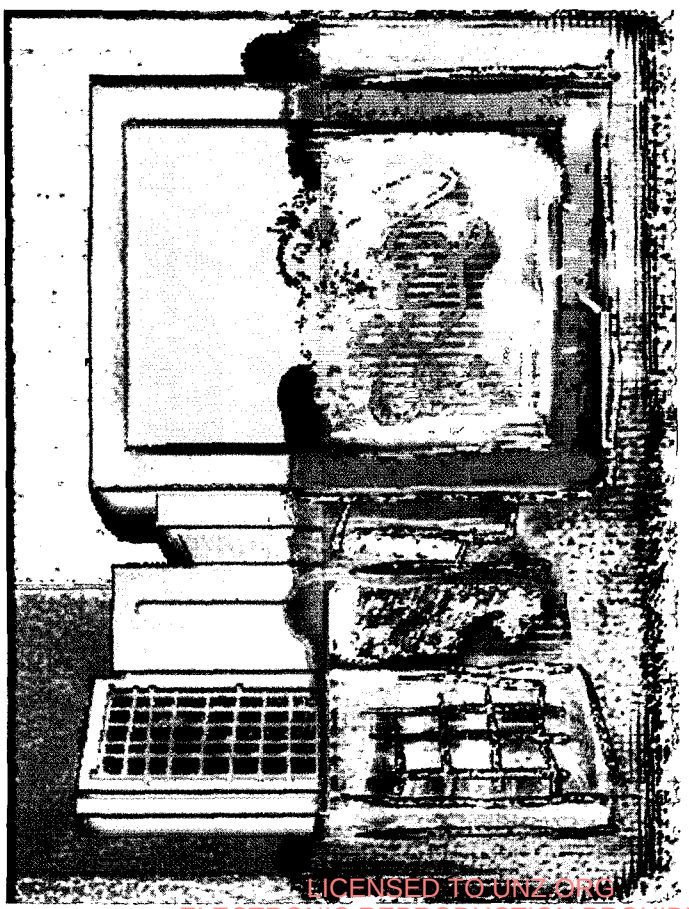
Computers have made some people increasingly productive. But they also have increased income inequality, since computer-users generally earn more.

But this phenomenon is not unprecedented. Greenwood of the University of Rochester points to other cases where a new device initially resulted in "rapid technological change, widening inequality, and slowing productivity growth." These precedents suggest what will likely happen as computer usage increases.

Since the 1950s, the cost of computing has fallen, on average, by 19 percent each year. Between 1840 and 1870, the increasing use of engines became commonplace in factories, and the growth of railroads ensured that shipping and power costs sharply declined. Similarly, James Watt's steam engines ensured that the cost of power fell dramatically in the late eighteenth century. Yet another technological boom occurred around 1910, when it became possible to run machines in a plant with individual motors, instead of linking all equipment to one giant motor. This change also increased efficiency and productivity, since factories did not have to halt production if a single motor failed.

When each of these technological changes occurred, Greenwood argues, skilled workers earned more and unskilled workers earned proportionately less. But new technologies slowly become simpler and easier to use, and eventually wages increased for all. According to Greenwood, in about 20 years computers will finally become common, convenient devices. At first, as computer usage increases, unskilled workers will be hurt, particularly as corporations shed secretaries, file clerks, and middle managers. But firms will strive to make computer use as simple as possible, in order to replace computer-adept people with less technically inclined and cheaper workers. In addition, more people will be trained in computer usage, reducing the premium placed on computer expertise.

In the end, Greenwood concludes, the wage disparities computers have created will disappear. And just like the steam engine, the railroad, and the dynamo, computers will ensure that "the rising tide of technological change will lift everybody's boat."



The Benefits of Deregulation

Robert Crandall and Jerry Ellig, Economic Deregulation and Consumer Choice: Lessons for the Electric Industry. *Center for Market Processes, George Mason University, 4084 University Drive #208, Fairfax, Virginia 22030.*

As Congress and the states debate whether and how to introduce competition to the electric power market, Brookings Institution fellow Crandall and George Mason University economist Ellig urge that the lessons of comparable industries be recalled. They look at five "network industries"—businesses that carry products or people from one point to another. The deregulation of trucking, railroads, airlines, telecommunications, and natural gas reveal a pattern:

• *Lower prices.* Adjusted for inflation, prices in the five industries fell between 28 and 57 percent in the decade after the deregulation. As a result, consumers save at least $57 billion annually.

• *More innovation.* After deregulation, airlines developed "hub-and-spoke" routing systems, enabling them to operate more efficiently. Deregulation allowed truckers and railroads to develop "intermodal" transport systems where trucks are shipped by rail for long distances. Intermodal systems are so efficient that 28 percent of America's trucks now spend some time on a railroad.

• *More business.* Falling prices ensure more demand for products. Natural gas consumption increased 21 percent in the first decade after deregulation. Falling trucking costs were a major reason United Parcel Service doubled in size between 1980-95. The number of airline

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flights nearly doubled after a decade of deregulation.

• *Improved lives.* Airline deregulation allowed the rise of low-cost airlines such as Southwest, making airline tickets affordable for people who would otherwise have to spend hours on a bus. Telephone deregulation lowered long-distance rates, allowing more people to spend more time talking to distant friends and relatives. Natural gas deregulation dramatically reduced the cost of heating homes.

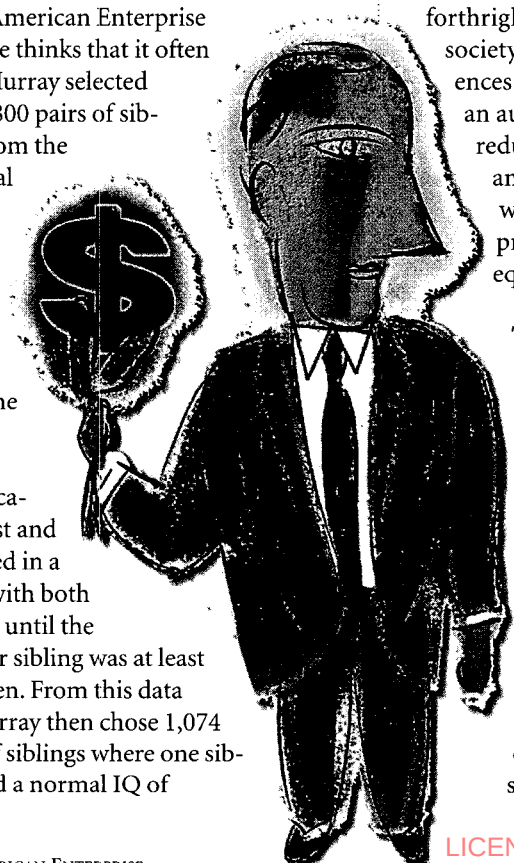
Whatever form electricity deregulation takes, consumers should benefit. "Regulatory reform is not a zero-sum game," the authors write. "It generated genuine gains for consumers and society as a whole."

SOCIETY

It Pays to Be Smart

Charles Murray, "IQ and Economic Success," in The Public Interest *(Summer 1997), 1112 16th Street N.W. #530, Washington, D.C. 20036.*

Does your success in life depend on your intelligence? Murray of the American Enterprise Institute thinks that it often does. Murray selected over 5,800 pairs of siblings from the National Longitudinal Study of Youth. All had taken the Armed Forces Qualification Test and had lived in a home with both parents until the younger sibling was at least age seven. From this data set, Murray then chose 1,074 pairs of siblings where one sibling had a normal IQ of between 90 and 109 and the other sibling was "conspicuously brighter or duller."



By choosing pairs of siblings from the same family, Murray could eliminate economic sources of inequality from his study. Yet he found that while 82 percent of the very bright siblings (IQs over 125) completed four years of college, only 18 percent of the normal siblings obtained a bachelor's degree. This finding, Murray suggests, contradicts "the assumption that rich parents can more or less ensure that all their children are educated through college no matter how smart they are."

Brighter people tended to have better-paying jobs. Murray calculates that the median 1992 earned income of the very bright siblings was $33,500, while bright siblings (IQs between 110 and 124) earned $26,500 and normal siblings earned $20,000.

Murray argues that this research, combined with the data collected in his book *The Bell Curve*, shows strong evidence that income inequality is correlated with intelligence. Liberals can use this finding to call for massive redistribution of income from the rich and the smart to the dumb and the poor. The conservative opposition "must state forthrightly why it thinks that a free society that tolerates large differences in outcomes is preferable to an authoritarian society that reduces them." Both the Right and the Left, Murray concludes, will have to admit that life's prizes are not distributed equally.

The *New York Times* Versus The Poor

Heather Mac Donald, "Behind the Hundred Neediest Cases," in City Journal *(Spring 1997), Manhattan Institute, 52 Vanderbilt Avenue, New York, New York 10017.*

Welfare historians agree an important change occurred when alms-givers stopped distinguishing between people who deserved help and scroungers who refused to reform. One way to see how attitudes changed is to look at the *New York Times*' "Neediest Cases," an appeal that has long called on charitable New Yorkers to help the less fortunate.

When the *Times* inaugurated the "Hundred Neediest Cases" appeal in 1912, reports Mac Donald, a Manhattan Institute fellow, the newspaper featured stories on widows, orphans, and the injured who became destitute because of circumstances they could not control. Readers were repeatedly warned that aid could sometimes make matters worse. "Do not give to the professional beggars on the streets, unworthy, all of them, and often criminals," the newspaper warned in 1913.

Gradually, moral strictures against the idle and dissolute weakened. In the 1940s, psychological analyzing became commonplace, and women who bore illegitimate children and men who refused to work became victims of "drives" they could not control. In 1949, the *Times* dropped the distinction between "deserving" and "undeserving" poor, stating that it would be a "bleak world...if we helped only those who were thoroughly blameless."

In the 1960s, the "Neediest Cases" was transformed into "an increasingly strident and political platform for welfare advocacy." Cases became blame-the-government profiles that claimed the problems of single motherhood could be solved if the government would only hand out more money. By 1975, Mac Donald notes, it was "taboo to mention that, by any historical measure, welfare spending was extraordinarily high."

Since 1973, the *Times*' "Neediest Cases" appear periodically throughout the year. Instead of "virtuous widows and orphans," the typical case features welfare mothers, prostitutes, or addicts who are routinely described as victims of circum-

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stances they cannot control. One woman, for example, was described as a "neediest case" because she was convicted of stealing $10,000 in welfare checks and her punishment included having her weekly welfare check reduced to $80.

The *Times*' Neediest Cases Fund, Mac Donald concludes, still does many worthy things like sending handicapped kids to summer camp and buying glasses for widows. But the fund's "unwillingness to render judgment on self-destructive behavior is part of a moral climate that has done real and lasting harm to the poor."

When Adoption Is Privatized

William D. Eggers, "There's No Place like Home," in Policy Review *(May/June 1997), Heritage Foundation, 214 Massachusetts Avenue N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002.*

Each year, half-a-million American children spend time in foster care, and about one-fifth of these kids never return home. Often they drift from one foster parent to another until they turn 18. Children's advocates have tried to make the foster-care system more humane, but Kansas has gone farther than most, reports Eggers, privatization director of the Reason Public Policy Institute. Kansas contracts out its adoption programs to the private sector.

Like many states, Kansas's foster-care system had been in disarray. Many children who could be adopted instead spent years in foster care with numerous foster parents. In 1990, the courts ordered improvement. By 1995, the state had "failed court-ordered reviews for five years running."

In 1995, Kansas switched to a private system. Nonprofit groups who successfully submit bids are paid a flat fee, regardless of whether a child spends a month or a full year in the system. This fee resembles the fees HMOs pay doctors for treating patients. Nonprofits are allowed a 10 percent cost overrun, but they are also able to keep up to 10 percent of any savings they achieve.

Because the fee is less than the cost of keeping a child in foster care for one year, nonprofits have an incentive to place children in adoption. Competitive bidding encourages nonprofits to come up with innovative ways to provide care. Some have formed alliances with HMOs. Faith-based charities can make arrangements with local churches or with the Salvation Army.

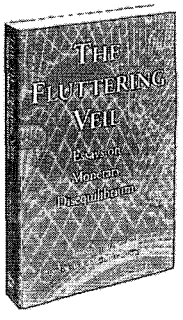
Adoption privatization, Eggers reports, encountered surprisingly little opposition. Government unions did not protest, because all of their members in the state adoption agency found jobs in other state agencies. Liberal groups like the Children's Defense Fund endorsed the plan, with the proviso that contractors guarantee that 90 percent of the children were neither neglected nor abused.

Some turmoil may come if the Kansas plan meets its goal of reducing the number of children in foster care by one-third. If that happens, some nonprofits may have to fold or shrink, and

Essays on Economics and Liberty

The Fluttering Veil
ESSAYS ON MONETARY DISEQUILIBRIUM

By Leland B. Yeager
Introduction by George Selgin



For three decades economist Leland Yeager has extolled the preeminent importance of money as a source of economic fluctuations whose influence goes well beyond mere changes in interest rates or the price level. His work discloses the disruptive consequences of "monetary disequilibrium"—that is, an imbalance of money supply and money demand. Consequently, he argues that well-designed monetary arrangements and policies are important to the success of any free-market economic system; and, that defects in the existing monetary arrangements in "capitalist" countries are manifestly not inherent in capitalism but are "alterable consequences" of the misguided interventions of government. In his Introduction to Yeager's eighteen essays, Professor George Selgin explains why "our understanding of the monetary foundations of a free society owes a great deal to the writings of Leland Yeager."

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may protest if their contracts are cut. But so far Kansas's privatized adoption system is "improving the lives of children in need."

OTHER COUNTRIES

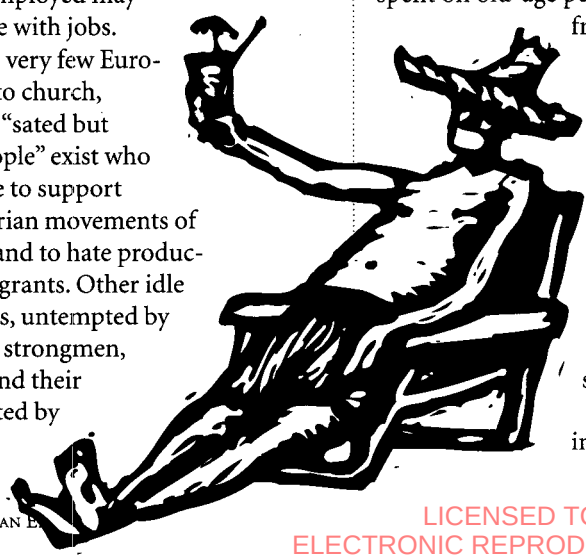
Europe Takes a Break

Steven Muller, "Time to Kill: Europe and the Politics of Leisure," in The National Interest *(Summer 1997), 1112 16th Street N.W. #540, Washington, D.C. 20036.*

Europe's economies are suffering from "Eurosclerosis" caused by high unemployment, low rates of job creation, and generous welfare payments. Muller, formerly president of Johns Hopkins University, points to another problem: Europeans with plenty of free time.

This European free time has many causes. Double-digit unemployment is partly due to generous unemployment checks that encourage idling on the dole. Europeans workers have more vacation time; while the average American has ten days of paid vacation, his counterpart in Britain or Spain has 22 days, while the Germans and French receive 25 days of paid leisure. Sick leave is also longer in Europe than in America. Germans can take at least six weeks a year off for illness. Italian blue-collar workers receive three months of sick leave, while Italy's managers can take a year of sick leave at any one time.

"Large-scale enforced leisure," Muller warns, will result in "a new form of social upheaval in Europe." The long-term unemployed may envy those with jobs. And since very few Europeans go to church, masses of "sated but bored people" exist who may come to support authoritarian movements of the right and to hate productive immigrants. Other idle Europeans, untempted by would-be strongmen, could spend their days sedated by "alcohol, tobacco, cocaine, Prozac," or TV.



Europeans, Muller argues, need to create societies where ample opportunities exist for citizens willing to work hard. Without the opportunity to be productive, Europeans will lose the chance to ensure that such democratic virtues as honesty, responsibility, and self-reliance are passed from one generation to the next. If European leaders can't figure out how to put people to work, democracy in Europe may be superseded by dictatorship and autarchy.

Japan Grows Old

Naohiro Ogawa and Robert D. Rutherford, "Shifting Costs of Caring for the Elderly Back to Families in Japan: Will It Work?" in Population and Development Review *(March 1997), Population Council, 1 Dag Hammarskjöld Plaza, New York, New York 10017.*

Like other nations, Japan is facing a demographic crisis as its population ages. Currently, 17 percent of Japanese are 65 and older, and demographers predict this percentage will rise to 20 percent by 2002 and 27 percent by 2025.

Unlike Europe or America, Japan is trying to shift the burden of paying for the elderly from the state to the family. But Ogawa, an economist at Japan's Nihon University, and East-West Center fellow Rutherford doubt that Japan's effort to restore the obligation between children and their parents will succeed.

The costs of social security in Japan are steadily rising. From 1965-94, the percentage of Japan's national income spent on old-age pensions increased from 6 to 16 percent, and the percentage of taxes spent on social insurance rose from 5 to 13 percent. By 2025, demographers predict that 25 percent of Japan's national income will be spent on social insurance.

Social insurance in Japan is a "pay-as-you-go" system; so the Japanese face the problem of a falling number of workers paying for a rising number of old people. According to researcher N. Takayama, while Japanese seniors born between 1925-29 had 4.3 younger workers to pay for their pensions, Japanese workers born between 1960-64 can expect 1.04 workers to pay for their benefits. In addition, relatively few Japanese have private pensions, ensuring that the costs of social security must inevitably rise.

One major difference between Japan and the West is that children are obligated by law to provide for their parents. In 1995, for example, 112 Japanese were prosecuted for failing to support their elderly relatives. Far more Japanese families encompass more than one generation than in Europe or America. While the percentage of three-generation Japanese households fell from 56 percent in 1972 to 33 percent in 1995, that's still far more than the one percent of American or the three percent of German households where parents, grandparents, and children live together.

Japanese planners, Ogawa and Rutherford report, hope to reinforce the traditional Confucian moral code, obliging children to support their parents and parents to bequeath their wealth to their children. But both sides of this code are severely weakened. According to a 1990 survey, a majority of Japanese elderly would prefer to spend their wealth on themselves than to leave it to their children. The National Survey on Family Planning reports that in 1963, 80 percent of married women under 40 surveyed thought it a "good custom" or a "natural duty" for children to support their parents. By 1996, only 47 percent thought it a good idea for children to care for their parents.

Changing demographics and weakening morals, Ogawa and Rutherford conclude, suggest that the Japan's "efforts to shift some of the responsibility for caring for the elderly from the social security system back to families will not be very successful."

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Opinion Pulse

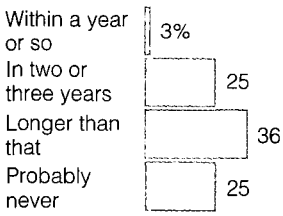
EDITED BY KARLYN BOWMAN

THE REACH OF TELEVISION

Fifty years ago, a quarter of Americans thought that they would never own a television set. Today, almost all Americans say they have a working set in the house, and a majority say they have three or more. Nearly three-quarters think television is a necessity, and only 27 percent describe it as a luxury they could do without. About 30 percent call a remote control or a VCR "necessities," but over 70 percent own them. Fewer than three in ten call basic cable or a second TV necessities, but significant numbers say they have these, too.

Question: **Do you think the chances are that you will own a television set...?**

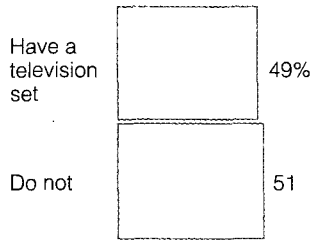
1946



Source: Survey by the Roper Organization for *Fortune*, January 1946.

Question: **Do you...?**

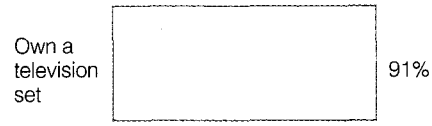
1953



Source: Survey by the Gallup Organization, September 1953.

Question: **Do you...?**

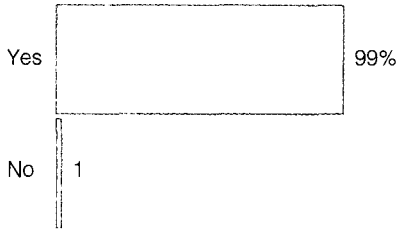
1961



Source: Survey by the Gallup Organization, November 1961.

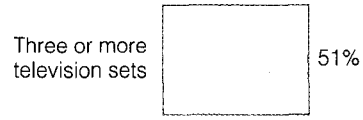
Question: **Is there at least one television in this household that is usually kept in working order...?**

1997



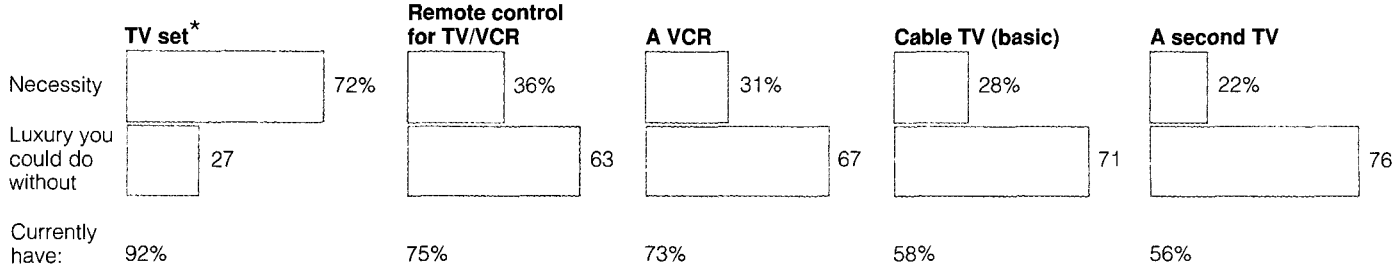
Question: **Let me read a list of electronic devices and services. Please tell me which ones, if any, your household has.**

1997



Source: Survey by NBC News/*Wall Street Journal*, June 1997.

Question: **Would you read down this list and tell me for each one whether you personally think of it pretty much as a...?**



Note: *In 1976, the first time this question was asked, 59 percent said a TV set was a necessity.
Source: Survey by Roper Starch Worldwide, January 1997.

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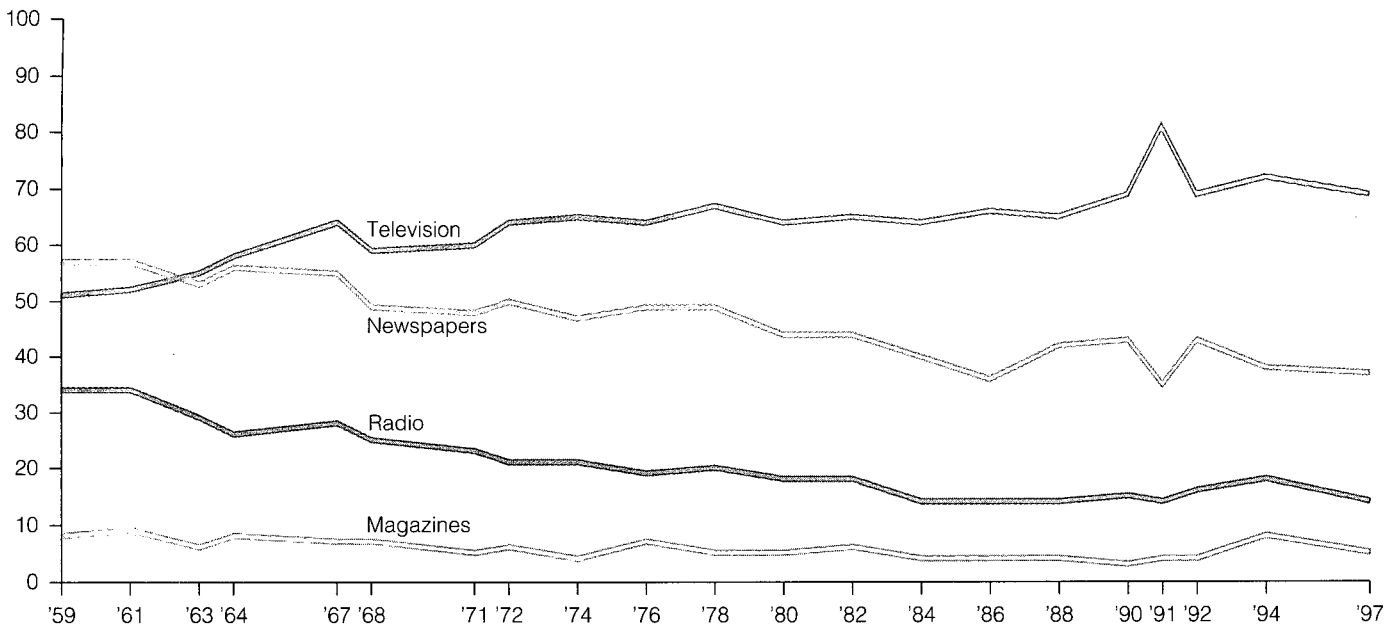
Television's Credibility . . .

Since 1963 more Americans have said they usually get their news from television rather than newspapers, radio, or magazines. In 1959, people said newspapers were the most credible source of news if there were conflicting reports. Today, people believe television is more credible. CBS, NBC, and ABC have seen a sharp decline in their audience share over the past 20 years.

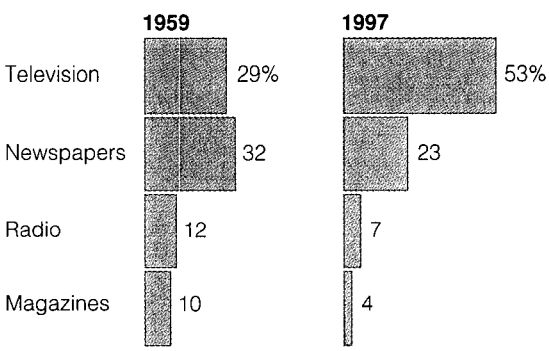
Question: **I'd like to ask you where you usually get most of your news about what's going on in the world today...?**



Source: Surveys by Roper Starch Worlwide, latest that of March 1997.

Question: **If you got conflicting or different reports of the same news story from..., which of the four versions...?**

Would be most inclined to believe...



This question has been asked over 20 times by Roper Starch World-wide. The second time it was asked, in 1961, more people said they would be more inclined to believe televison than newspapers (39 to 24 percent), and this has been the case ever since.

Source: Surveys by Roper Starch Worlwide, latest that of March 1997.

Prime-time Network Audience Shares

The decline in audience share of the three major networks during prime time has been dramatic. The audience share of the highest rated network in the 1988–1989 season (NBC at 26) was lower than the audience share of the lowest rated network in the 1978–1979 season (also NBC at 27).

	ABC	CBS	NBC	Fox
1978–1979	34	30	27	—
1988–1989	21	20	26	—
1996–1997	15	16	18	13

Note: The season is September–April for 1978–1979 and 1988–1989. It was September–mid May for the 1996–1997 period.
Source: Nielsen Media Research.

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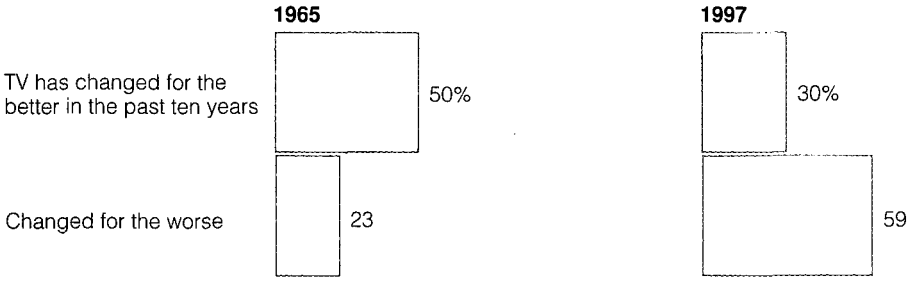
. . . and its Content

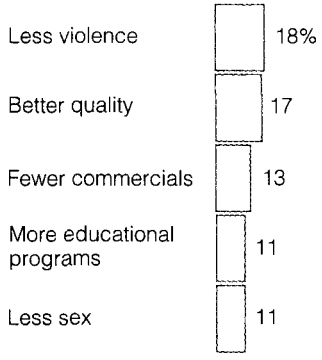
In 1965, when Gallup asked whether TV had changed for the better or worse in the past 10 years, 50 percent said it had changed for the better. When NBC News and the *Wall Street Journal* repeated that question recently, 59 percent said it had changed for the worse. Why the change in attitudes? Too much violence is the major concern, though the quality, commercials, and sexual content also trouble viewers. Majorities say they want more histories and documentaries, movies, news, and dramas. Eighty percent would like to see fewer talk shows, and 85 percent fewer soap operas.

Question: **Would you say...?**



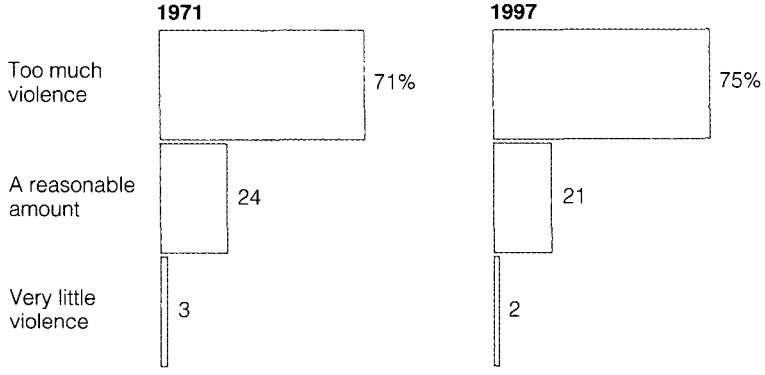
Source: Surveys by the Gallup Organization, 1965 and by NBC News/*Wall Street Journal*, June 1997.

Question: **What do you think is the most important thing the networks and the television stations could do to increase your satisfaction when you watch television...?**



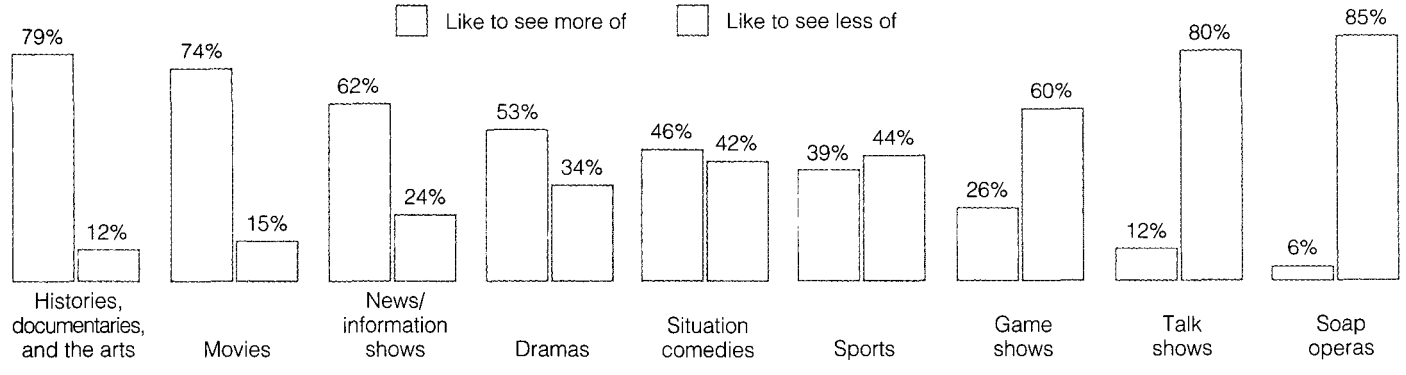
Source: Survey by the *Los Angeles Times*, September 1989.

Question: **How do you feel about the amount of violence portrayed on television programs today, not including news programs? Is there...?**



Source: Surveys by Louis Harris and Associates, 1971 and the Pew Research Center, January 1997.

Question: **Looking ahead to the next few years, for each of the following types of TV programs I name, please tell me whether you'd...**



Source: Survey by NBC News/*Wall Street Journal*, June 1997.

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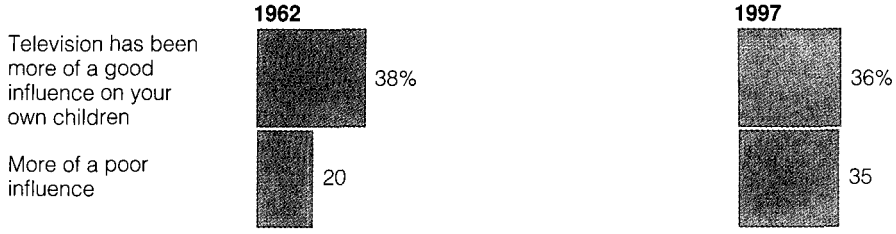
TV's Effects on Children and Adults

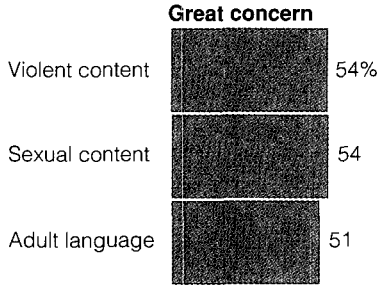
Over the past 35 years, the number saying that television is a poor influence on children has risen from 20 to 35 percent. Parents are concerned about violence, sexual content, and adult language. A majority of parents limit the television their children watch, but a third do not. The mean time allowed for viewing on school days is 2.3 hours. Only 13 percent of adults describe themselves as addicted to television. A near majority say their life would not be much different without television, but of the remainder, more say it would be worse than better.

Question: **In general, would you say that...**



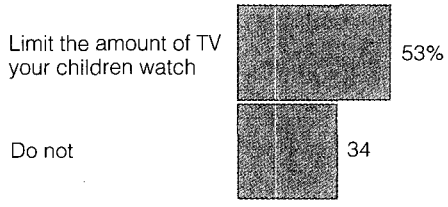
Source: Survey by the Gallup Organization, 1962 and NBC News/*Wall Street Journal*, June 1997.

Question: **How concerned are you that your (child/children) is being exposed to too much...**



Source: Survey by the Pew Research Center, January 1997.

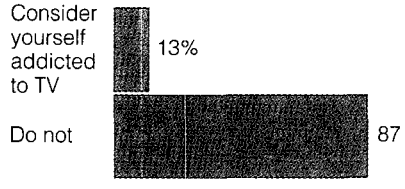
Question: **Do you...?**



The mean amount of television that parents with children said they allowed their children to watch on a school day was 2.3 hours.

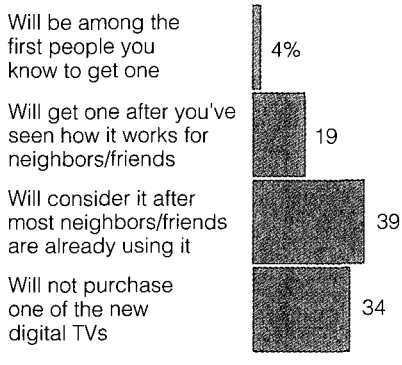
Source: Survey by Bruskin-Goldring Research, February 1997.

Question: **Do you...**



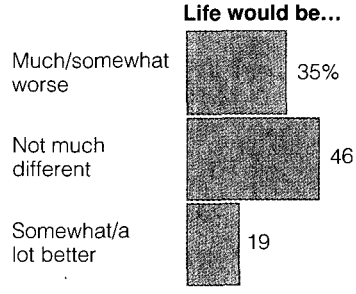
Source: Survey by the Gallup Organization, August 1990.

Question: **By the end of next year, there will be a new generation of digital TVs on the market offering much clearer pictures and better sound, but they will be expensive. Generally speaking, when it comes to buying the new generation of digital TVs, do you think you personally...?**



Source: Survey by NBC News/*Wall Street Journal*, June 1997.

Question: **Trying to be as honest as you can, what would be the impact on your life if television was taken out of your home altogether?**



Source: Survey by the Gallup Organization, August 1990.

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the Mail

As a longtime reader of and sometime contributor to TAE, I was disappointed with the logic behind Dave Geisler's account of his older brother's dissipation ("A Ruined Life," May/June). Paralleling the faulty logic of gun-control advocates, Geisler argues that people don't ruin their lives, drugs ruin people's lives.

But he ignored the fact that most casual drug users evince absolutely no problems relating to drug use. Most drug users responsibly regulate their use of controlled substances. That's one of the reasons why, as government statistics show, drug use peaks in young adulthood (ages 18-25), when users have relatively few responsibilities, and declines with age.

In any case, individuals remain responsible for their actions. Foisting that responsibility off on an inanimate substance that most people consume without engaging in "unpredictable and scary" behavior is dangerous personal and public policy.

But if Geisler wants to argue from personal anecdote, then how about this one: In college, I knew a half-dozen people who, on occasion, smoked pot, dropped acid, and used other drugs—and who went on to earn Ph.D.s, become productive members of society, and responsibly raise children.

Nick Gillespie
Houston, Texas

I read with great dismay Armstrong Williams' sanctimonious, self-righteous article ("'60s Kids Grown Big," May/June). It is typical of the mind set which is increasingly driving voters away from the GOP. So what if Clinton's or Newt's parents re-married? Unfortunately, most of us do not have perfect, pristine lives because reality is often difficult, painful, and complex.

Working-class voters of my generation are as alienated from the intolerant, narrow-minded, authoritarian moral terrorists of the Right as we are from the Hillary-loving leftists in the Democratic Party. Just as the Democrats lost supporters because they allowed the radical Left to gain control of their party, the GOP is now in danger of losing their hard-won support because of the radical Right's domination. Most voters see the dangers and fallacies in both these extremist movements and ideologies.

Linda Warren
Wichita, Kansas

Keith Richburg put into words what I have been unable to articulate for the past 13 years ("An American in Africa," July/August). I actually lived and worked in Africa from 1980-84. I am a white male and was working as an engineer in the oil industry. After my return to the U.S., my experiences had a powerful impact on my attitudes toward the national news media and political leaders, as well as my co-workers and friends.

One particularly vivid experience was a meeting with a black American family in a restaurant at the Hotel Ivoire in Abidjan, Ivory Coast. The father was a New York attorney who had been tracing his roots after reading Alex Haley's best-seller. When I asked him how it was going, he said, "Thank God for slavery because I'm no more African than you are."

Kevin Brabec
Pleasanton, California

Bravo to T.J. Rodgers (LIVE, July/August) for making the principled case for laissez-faire capitalism! How refreshing to find a successful corporate executive who eschews dangerous liaisons with the political class.

Having read his excellent defense of the free market, it came as no surprise that Rodgers' favorite author is Ayn Rand and that he believes "she is the patron saint of capitalism." In a similar vein, in 1975 a young James Fallows wrote in *The Atlantic Monthly* that "[Ayn Rand's point] is that some people are in business for the joy, even the nobility, of bringing men and materials together, taking risks and staving off disasters, and finally producing something good that other people can use or enjoy."

Which begs the question: Why wasn't Rand given any other mention in your issue on the ethics and aesthetics of business?

Sean Rushton
Washington, D.C.

As a founder of Young Americans for Freedom and someone who is mentioned in "Revolt on the Campus," I want to add some details to the enjoyable remarks by Karl Zinsmeister and Dana Rohrabacher on the beginnings of modern political conservatism ("Right in the '60s," May/June).

In the early '60s there was some positive mainstream press recognition of the new young conservatives—*Fortune* had a piece, for example. These had somewhat of a man-bites-dog aspect. But the tone turned hostile as Senator Goldwater became a more viable candidate. We were always clearly a minority; the civil rights and later the anti-war movements were larger. Many students did not support the Left, however.

The American Enterprise welcomes your comments. Send to "The Mail," The American Enterprise, 1150 17th Street N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036. Or fax to (202) 862-5867. Or e-mail 75272.1226@compuserve.com. Please include your address and phone number. Published letters may be edited for length and clarity.

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When the student government at the University of Chicago, where I was in school, condemned President Kennedy's actions in the Cuban missile crisis in 1962, 18 members were unseated in a recall election.

John C. Weicher
Hudson Institute

Robert Bork says that gun bans aid criminals and endanger decent folks (LIVE, May/June). But Bork has also said that the Second Amendment doesn't guarantee citizens of this country their being able to deter tyranny by having arms of their own. Has the judge undergone an epiphany, or is this just revisionism in action? Why wasn't Judge Bork confronted with his prior statements on the subject of the Second Amendment?

P.J. O'Rourke, Bork's interlocutor, surely knows this, as do the vast majority of gun owners of conservative/libertarian viewpoint, yet TAE let this slide. Why? Is it due to Bork's status as a doyen of the Right? Is TAE, along with other conservatives, following the Republican maxim of "Thou shalt not criticize a fellow...." Perhaps TAE agrees with Bork's contention that portable radios are a factor contributing to this nation's descent into Hell?

J. McDonald
Fresno, California

Like your editor's, our family has found that much of the traditional reading material published for children from 1850-1950 is far superior to the output of the last four decades (BIRD'S EYE, March/April). As a result, my wife and I have established a small publishing house that reprints some of the best children's works of the past for use today.

I would also second Zinsmeister's description of home-schooling families as both traditional and innovative—particularly with regard to computers. Homeschoolers use computers heavily in word processing, desktop publishing, communication, and research, while recognizing that the personal computer is a tool with limits. In the realm of educational instruction today, computer hype far exceeds reality. Teaching is an inherently human process, and most attempts to substitute a computer for teaching fail miserably.

Governments today seem bewitched by the mirage that wiring every classroom will somehow magically produce a globally competitive workforce. Not likely! There is no substitute for teachers who care for their students and who see education as part of the process of shaping character. For most homeschooling parents this is an extension of our responsibilities as parents. When the government tries to substitute for family and parents, it does many times more harm than good, and it encourages too many parents to abdicate their responsibilities.

Robert G. Shearer, Greenleaf Press
1570 Old LaGuardo Road
Lebanon, TN 37087

Karl Zinsmeister states that "Bill Clinton has normalized the idea that a thoroughly dishonest personal character is nothing to hold against a national leader, so long as he brings home the bacon." (BIRD'S EYE, July/August).

It is disturbing that he made this comment without citing proof to back up his allegation. In Canada, we would call this defamation of character or libel. President Clinton and your readership deserve an apology for Zinsmeister's libelous comments.

Justin B. Disher
Welland, Ontario, Canada

Karl Zinsmeister replies:
Here's what Democratic Senator Bob Kerrey says about the Arkansas traveler's honesty: "Clinton's an unusually good liar. Unusually good. Do you realize that?"

Here's what liberal journalists covering the President have written: "A clear pattern has emerged—of delay, of obfuscation, of lawyering the truth"; "In the national press corps, the belief that Mr. Clinton shades the truth appears widely held"; "This president salts his remarks with inventions, half-truths, and self-serving exaggerations."

Here's what Watergate reporter Bob Woodward says: "People feel, and I think rightly, that they're not being leveled with. That they're not given straight talk.... There is this tendency in Clinton which you see all through his life of, 'How do we spin our way out of it? How do we put out 10 percent of the truth? How do we try to conceal or delay or obfuscate?'"

Hmmm.... Maybe in our next issue we should prove that Robert Reich is short.

I give up! I promise to read faithfully every issue of TAE. My work gets busier as the years go by, and I must discipline my reading time. But TAE just gets better and better. You have forced me to push something else off the reading list.

I just finished reading through the July/August issue. My eyes are watering and my side hurts from laughing, my mind is racing with new ideas, my secretary thinks I have gone off the deep end, and I need to get on to other tasks. The interview with T.J. Rodgers alone was worth the price of admission. How do you come up with dozens of good subjects for each issue?

Ross C. Korves
American Farm Bureau Federation

Joel Kotkin's "The New Left Takes Over American Unions" provides textbook examples of journalism at its worst. I know about his blunders because I was among the victims (May/June). First, Kotkin attacked me by using a quote from an unidentified source, always a shoddy reporting practice. To make matters worse, Kotkin never made any effort to contact me prior to publication of the article to give me a chance to respond. If he had bothered to call me, he might have avoided making yet another mistake. Immediately after characterizing me as an advocate for labor's cause rather than as the objective reporter that I am, Kotkin cited what he called gushing profiles in the *Los Angeles Times* of "the labor Left's icons." The trouble is, I didn't write any of the stories he mentioned.

Stuart Silverstein
Los Angeles Times

Joel Kotkin responds:
I would like to offer this brief apology to Stuart Silverstein. Mentioning my Los Angeles Times *colleague by name was in poor taste, and I sincerely feel sorry for whatever pain and embarrassment I caused him or the* Times.

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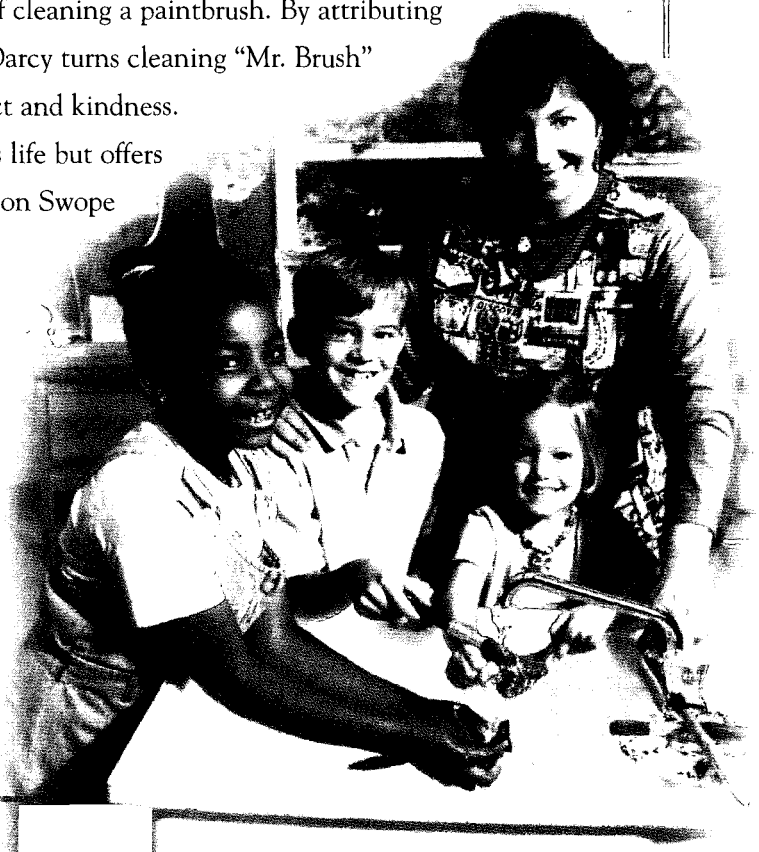
This Isn't Just A Course In Art, It's A Course In Living.

While most art classes teach us how to express life, it is a rare one indeed that teaches us how to live it. But that's what Darcy Swope aspires to in her art classes at The Potomac School in McLean, Virginia.

In addition to teaching her students the fundamentals of drawing and painting, Darcy incorporates lessons that instill lifelong habits and values. Classwide projects, like the creation of a gigantic rainbow, become opportunities to show the importance of sharing and cooperation. Group discussions about individual works of art teach the children to see things from different perspectives and to critique with sensitivity.

There's even a lesson in the simple act of cleaning a paintbrush. By attributing human feelings to the children's art supplies, Darcy turns cleaning "Mr. Brush" into a metaphor for treating others with respect and kindness.

For showing us how art not only imitates life but offers lessons in it, we are proud to honor Darcy Mason Swope as our newest Good Neighbor Award winner. State Farm is pleased to contribute $5,000 in her name to The Potomac School.



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